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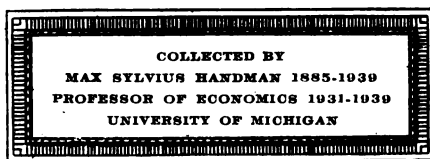
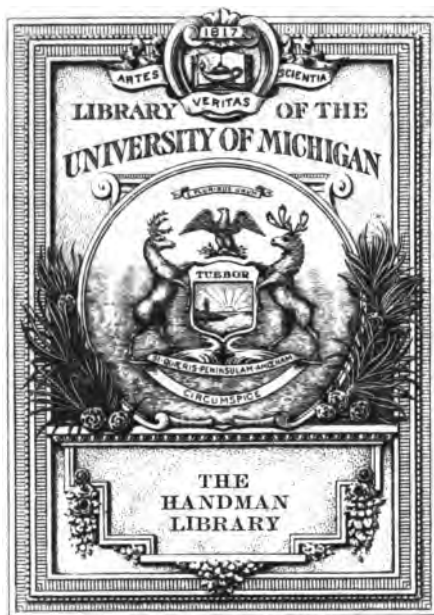
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# LORD MACAULAY

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# LORD MACAULAY

and BY  
D. H. MACGREGOR

SCHOLAR OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

*BEING THE MEMBERS' PRIZE ESSAY FOR 1900*



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## LORD MACAULAY.

A century after the birth of Macaulay, it is still doubtful what rank of fame will finally be his. Truly enough, we are still very near to him; too near, it may be, to gauge his height correctly. We are still little remote from his contemporaries; we have even yet those among us who have seen his features and heard his voice. The influences of his work have not yet passed away. They are not yet perfected and may not yet be fully judged. And in this generation criticism is in no slight degree stayed by all that we know of the man himself, by the singular fascination of his life and of his nature, by the purity of his literary ardour, by the high integrity of his public service. Time will remedy all this; a later posterity will see him in his true

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relations, and will judge him with the impartiality of a stranger. But our nearness to him cannot by itself account for the fact that his position has yet to be assigned to him. For many who lived by his side have gone to their rest secure of a definite fame by the certain and general judgment of men. Hallam and Wordsworth, Dickens and Thackeray and Carlyle are names not hard to place. Each of these has his evident and peculiar stamp. The same cannot be said of Macaulay. The clue to his genius is not easy to follow. To read his works is to delight the ✓ attention and inspire the feelings. But when we are asked to estimate him, we hesitate. In the cause of this hesitation, real difficulty must be added to something of reluctance.

The great diversity of his work may well render impossible a judgment without qualification. All of us regard him from the standpoint of our own tastes ; we severally think of him as preeminently a poet, a critic, an historian, an orator ; some may value him most for a certain

tone and spirit, a note of the old classic *humanitas* that is felt in all, even his most faulty work; others may attribute to him the fame only of a master of style. Something can be said for every view of him. But wherever the emphasis of our esteem may fall, none of his work is slight enough to be overshadowed by any other part of it. He lies in Poet's Corner; and in number, perhaps, those who know him by his stirring *Lays* overtop any other body of his admirers. But the tribute of his College to his various qualities of mind is that which must be followed here. In a judgment so broad it may not be easy to preserve unity. Yet there are, it seems to me, unique traits of genius which reveal themselves in all the aspects of his many-sided life.

At the present time the opinion of men of letters regarding him runs strongly in the direction of criticism. All are agreed that the man himself is an ornament to our literature and our public life. It is agreed, too, that there

are few in this century whose work, despite high literary qualities, has been so little over the heads of the people. His influence does not stay in the closet but reaches the forum; and he is welcome wherever he is known. But yet, as Aristotle has said of Plato, when both our friends and the truth are dear to us, the truth must be preferred; and round the intrinsic value of Macaulay's work vigorous and penetrative criticism continues to gather. His own critical judgment is assailed; the knife he did so much to sharpen is turned upon himself. His new and striking departure in historical method is condemned on the witness of its result. His poetry, it is said, is an exotic growth, his style a gaudy mannerism. To much of this indictment we must consent; but our consent will not always be unqualified. For there are faults and faults. There are faults which greatly serve the ends of truth by defining her limits more closely; there are scholars' errors which touch the imagination with all the

force of truth ; there are those errors of reaction which goes to an extreme, but still of reaction from what is false, which in every sphere of knowledge have been the footsteps of progress. From some of these, and from lesser, defects no one will clear Macaulay. His was a mind whose strength was closely allied to its weakness ; which was too brilliant to be cautious, and too quick to be profound. His faults therefore lie side by side with his merits. Yet from every repeated appeal to his work, from weighing what is best in it against its acknowledged blots, we return with a conscious right to the assertion that, despite many failings, time will vindicate a great and an immortal name.

One characteristic of his work is peculiarly liable to stand in the way of those who approach it with open minds for the first time. He is a writer of the utmost self-consciousness. He is a critic who reflects upon himself. With his work he offers us the canons by which to test it. We have his *History* and his *Essay on*

History; his biographies, and his repeated censure of the biographers' errors; his poems and his poetical criticism, together with his favourite theory that the poetical and critical faculties are all but incompatible. Where he succeeds he is self-approved; where he fails, he is self-condemned. Sometimes his canons betray his work, sometimes his work shows the inadequacy of his canons. What is deserving of attention is the unconscious advantage he is apt to obtain over his reader. He predisposes us to take a great deal for granted. By having indicated the places of danger beforehand he is apt to get the credit of being supposed immune against falling into them; by having applauded all the virtues, he may be supposed to possess them. He that accuses him of partiality as an historian will be referred for his answer to the *Essay on History*; to him who blames Macaulay's love of the superlative in biography, it will be replied that no one more severely animadverted on this attitude than did Macaulay

himself. But such reasonings must not turn us aside. We may be surprised at the qualities of mind which made Macaulay at once sensitive of errors and prone to commit them; though to those who know the Celtic nature there is nothing new, but everything familiar in that. The danger is, lest we take him too much at his own valuation; lest we read him through his own spectacles. There are few authors so likely, after this fashion, to warp their readers' judgment.

The literary work of Macaulay reveals a mind of a very remarkable order. He was eminently receptive and unspontaneous. His passion for literature partook almost of mysticism. He made an almost unreserved surrender of himself to the great intellects of history, to be shaped and formed by them as clay is shaped by the potter. He yielded up his spirit to be pervaded by their influences, suffused by the warmth of their genius, lit by the reflection of their light. From childhood to old age, his



reverence was the same. He read and re-read and read again, endlessly rehearsing the old classics and the new, till their spirit was his spirit, and his taste theirs. Hence it is, that his mind is altogether formed from without and that its deepest springs are untouched. Absence of that initiative which marks a strong nature makes him more of an impressionist than of a thinker, sensitive and imaginative rather than careful and exact, tasteful rather than systematic, brilliant rather than consistent. His emotions overbear his reason ; his heart is open to all that is solemn or majestic or in any way grand and impressive. He is not active enough in the assimilation of knowledge, does not go out of himself to grasp it, but allows it merely to make its mark upon the surface of his mind. We find in his work, therefore, great literary grace and finesse, brilliant and vivid word-painting, rapid and glancing argument, an air of much learning that sits lightly, sympathies that are quickly engaged, strong passions that

will not be corrected. We miss depth and method and caution, the strong sinews of thought, and firm independence of judgment.

It is as essayist and critic that we may speak of him first. Criticism is, however, not the term which best suits his manner. Our purpose will be better served by the division of literature into a primary and a secondary order. It is an important difference that some men create their own materials, while others merely develop materials given them, in history, or in the work of other men. The type of genius represented by the latter order implies the gifts of sympathy, of arrangement, of interpretation, of description, of comparison. It is work done upon other work, the literature of literature.

Primary literature is the work of original authors. These are the true poets or makers who see visions and dream dreams. They are the great creative and constructive minds of history. It is the mark of their genius to be spontaneous. The creative faculty is given.

Poets are born, not made. No keenness of analytic power will by itself enable us to construct. There is a genius that cannot be equated with even an unlimited capacity for taking pains. Fitter expression for it may be acquired ; the power itself cannot be. This is the genius of poetry and romance, and of all the great library of inventors in all the fields of knowledge. Secondary literature, on the other hand, implies the genius of history, of commentary, of criticism. It weaves no graceful or majestic fictions. It pays court not to fancy, but to truth. It seeks not to create but to interpret. "The task of an author," as Johnson says, "is either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them ; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has

already made its progress as may tempt it to return and take a second view of things hastily passed over or negligently regarded." (*Rambler*, No. 3.) Secondary literature desires not to create new wealth, but to make the old wealth current coin; not to conquer new land, but to hold that which has been won. In the most general terms, it is the genius of research.

When we style Macaulay a critic we imply all that comes under the title of secondary literature. It is when he abandons narration and research for theory and speculation that he fails most notably. All his work, in fact, is conformable to our classification. For history, biography, and criticism being granted, it is also the mark of ballad poetry that in it the author obliterates himself wholly, and tells in the plainest and simplest verses some story of the past. Macaulay is at his best where he is fullest of this, the descriptive spirit. His Essays are therefore of a different type from those of Bacon and Cowley, Addison and Johnson and

Lamb. They create literature directly, he does so only indirectly. Their imagination is productive, his is reproductive. They love to break new ground; he loves to ramble in the old fields. As a child, he had trod the highways of history and of literature; to his death, he liked nothing so much as to traverse and retrace their paths and bypaths, to turn his lamp into every nook and corner, and find them all familiar. From the future he turned away; the fanciful he left to others. He did not seek to be a new ruler in the world of letters; but only to bring others under the dominion of his sceptred dead—his Milton, his Bacon, his Addison, his William the Third, his Chatham, his Pitt. And the influence which he seeks to convey is exerted more on the imagination than on the reason. He likes less to point the moral than to adorn the tale.

The issue, at the beginning of this century of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* marks the foundation in England of the critical school. Not that there had not been criticism before

then ; but at that date it was taken out of the hands of a few poets and essayists, and took official rank as a distinct order of literature. A new study, a new order of genius, were called for. In the growth of this school from childhood to manhood is found one of the distinguishing marks of this century's progress. Decidedly the most famous name is Macaulay's. He brought new and high ideals of criticism into vogue when the school was still young ; and so he exerted an influence which has not yet ceased to express itself. ✓

Asperitatis et invidiae corrector et irae,  
Recte facta refert, orientia tempora notis  
Instruit exemplis.

Especially did Macaulay's ideals of historical criticism become ingrown from an early stage into the methods of critics. All his ideas have been improved on. His treatment of the *nota exempla* of the past is not always sound. But the extrinsic value and influence of his work remain. He is the outstanding figure among ✓

the makers of English criticism. To him we owe much of the progress which enables us to see his defects. His faults of method are the faults of a pioneer.

The influence of the school he so largely formed has been twofold. It has been exercised both on knowledge and on literature. On knowledge in the first instance; for to order and develop the vast material of the past is so far from being the work of any artisan in Atlantis, that we rightly regard the scholar's mind as higher in the scale of literary greatness than many grades of creative genius. Truth must have its interpreters. And although language may be of less absolute value than thought, yet when both are essential we can as little deny fame to the interpreter as to the thinker. We cannot repeat the quarrel of the factors of seventy-four, in which thirty-seven began to assume airs, as being much the greater. The critic's work is indispensable. The value of it cannot be better expressed than in words used

of one of Macaulay's great successors<sup>1</sup> in criticism: "He is an interpreter, an expositor. He is eyes to men, a guide. That such work has no place value, no one will admit. While we are stern advocates of reading originals, we can still recognise and apportion praise to any man whose writings bring these originals to our use and who inspire us to original study. Furthermore, the interpreter has an honourable and distinctive place as such. It comes but rarely that men make discoveries; it abides continually that writers should make use of discoveries, work out their application, and sternly demand that they shall be considered. Nearly all that we know, we know by such work." And there are some critics, we may add, of whom Macaulay is one, who have not merely interpreted, but have interpreted in a language so delightful as to enhance what they reveal. Such pre-eminently was Cicero. If these men have not created, at least they can claim that there was a world of

<sup>1</sup> John Morley, *v. Fortnightly Review* for August 1st, 1900.



knowledge which they found of brick and left of marble.

The influence of criticism reaches also to literature itself. It represents literature grown self-conscious—framing rules of conduct for the future by the lessons of the past. One of the results of vigorous criticism is certain to be a great attention to style. And we find that in fact this century is fertile of men whose fame lies as much in how they write as in what they write. What a contrast between Scott and Stevenson! We were never more particular than we are now regarding form. This is one aspect of the movement in which Macaulay's part has been a great one. His style must be felt to be understood. But if, for the moment, we lay aside the rhetorical features which have somewhat spoiled its beauty, we shall not be wrong in asserting that no English author has displayed in an equal degree the ductility, the purity, the transparency, of our language at its best. He has been called "the perfect expositor

of machine-made English"; but this phrase does not do justice to the liquid rhythm of his diction. Such a model could not but have its effect. To-day, we see style raised into a cult ✓ by the critical school. But to render us jealous of our language has not been the only result of criticism. It has also developed the canons of method in all the spheres of learning. Here again Macaulay's influence was great and timely. On History and Biography he imposed tests and conferred ideals. Although he may sometimes have gone too far, as all ideals do go at their origin, yet it remains that in these sciences especially his tenets have long been guiding posts and danger signals to both authors and readers. Thus criticism has become in a way the lately aroused conscience of literature.

Such is the school of the critics, the "sentinels in the avenues of time," and such Macaulay's place in it. It is when we pass from the extrinsic to the intrinsic value of his work that we ✓ find greater scope for discussion. The recep-

tivity and imaginativeness of his mind betray him into faults that are patent and that cannot be argued away. The source and origin of his failings as a critic may be indicated in either of two ways,—a too sensitive imagination, or a reason not sufficiently self-assertive. These faults are implied in one another. And both are closely connected with his merits.

His imagination was too sensitive. From a critic we look first for a balanced mind and sensibilities well under control. He must be patient of facts, must give way to no violent enthusiasms or dislikes, must sketch the grey in grey, must render, with an even impartiality, the good as good, the bad as bad, the indifferent as indifferent. But Macaulay's mind was impatient of the commonplace, readily susceptible to loves and hatreds, highly conservative of its first influences, prone to brilliance of colour and averse to sombreness of hue, rendering the good as admirable, the bad as despicable, and the indifferent almost not at all. A gay, brilliant,

glancing touch likes him better than the slow elaboration of thoughtful paragraphs. He writes with a smile on the lip and a sparkle in the eye rather than with drawn brow and hesitating pen. He loved the picturesque, the clear-cut, the definite, that which could bear the weight of a vivid superlative. If he escapes the charge of Boswellism, it is only because his failing is a more general one. Boswell loved strong terms of praise and adulation; but Macaulay loved strong terms of any sort. Where he was attracted, he was liable to be fascinated; where repelled, to be disgusted. This sensitiveness reveals itself in many ways; but most evidently in the rhetorical tendencies of his style, and in his extreme attitudes towards individuals or principles of thought.

He disliked the commonplace as a banker dislikes two per cent.; and, like the latter, takes risks rather than endure it. He aims at vivid impressions through telling figures of speech. And if the truth will not fit an epigram, an

antithesis, or a superlative, Macaulay's bias is to stretch the truth a point until it does; to substitute the stylish overstatement for the prosaic fact. But it is plain that whatever is thus gained in force of style is lost in weight of reasoning. The brilliant is apt to become the bizarre. And where such rhetoric is carried far, we are only led to suspect our author's good faith. For we know that the chances are against the conformability of the truth to such precise and rigorous and extreme forms of expression.

A few cases may be instanced. How frequent with Macaulay are the phrases "the best in the world," or "the worst in the world." Dante's simile of the sheep is "the most perfect passage of its kind in the world"; while a sonnet of Petrarch's is "the worst attempt at poetry and the worst attempt at wit in the world"; both these opinions being expressed when Macaulay was only twenty-three. Because, apparently, Milton wrote a great epic in an age of considerable enlightenment, therefore

“no poet has ever had to struggle with more unfavourable circumstances than Milton.” Does not the assertion leap out of the page like the pattern of a gaudy wall-paper? Or take his favourite theory of poetry. “As civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines,” “as the reason grows, the imagination decays.” Such are the neat antitheses to which he seeks to fit the history of poetry, with what success everyone knows. Writing on Dryden, he speaks of poetry as a “spell”; yet in order to give emphasis to his words on Milton he says: “We often hear of the magical influence of poetry. The expression in general means nothing; but, applied to the writings of Milton, it is most appropriate.” It “means nothing!” Though he has just told us that “poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind as a magic lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body.” Even in his biographies, despite his censure on biographers for this practice, he is not exempt from the same failing. But it is

idle to instance particular cases of a method so characteristic of Macaulay. The whole Essay on Milton, or the concluding half of the Essay on Bacon, show most clearly how easily he was carried away, by sensibilities not well in control, into a rhetoric with which at times, and especially in the latter Essay, he becomes almost intoxicated. But Criticism, in Johnson's fine allegory, is the daughter of Labour and of Truth; the torch of her father "pierced through the robes which rhetoric often sold to falsehood, and detected the disproportion of parts which artificial veils had been contrived to cover."

It is indeed not easy to find a parallel for the style of Macaulay. Of its literary excellence something has been said. It is to its power that I refer now. Its art is often insidious, its plausibility often saps the judgment entirely. He is a master of the art of persuasion; of holding the attention to his words, of charming it away from reflection, till the case is rushed and we feel our reason coerced. He quickly

gets *en rapport* with his reader; soon he has him in his power. His bait is a paradox, or an epigram, or an attractive and mysterious opening sentence which excites the curiosity. Then comes the swell of rhetoric, the balanced antitheses, the kettle-drummery of his short sentences, the rich allusions, the particular cases which let down the sustained imagination, the pleasant cadence which rounds off the whole. We are "almost persuaded"; it is only when we retrace our steps that we find fallacy lurking in some ingenuous antithesis or epigram that seemed too delightful not to be true. Evenness of temper, grave and masculine judgment are too often played with.

That he practised this "sham art," he has himself avowed. "Probably," he writes to Napier, "in estimating the real value of any tinsel which I may put upon my articles, you and I should not materially differ. But it is not by his own taste but by the taste of the fish that the angler is determined in his choice of bait." In the



literature of fiction this may be the case. But it is much to be regretted that these words have come down to us from a great critic. Nor were the heights of rhetoric his only art of style. He could capture the reason by playing low as well as by playing high. Under the appearance of sturdy commonsense, he will introduce a certain cavalierness of treatment, to give his opinion the air of being quite plain to everybody who is not a fool. Witness his attack on Utilitarianism. The theory, now even more influential than in his time, is, he says, "not much more laughable than phrenology, and immeasurably more humane than cock-fighting"; while the school is largely composed, in his view, of "smatterers, whose attainments just suffice to elevate them from the insignificance of dunces to the dignity of bores, and to spread dismay among their pious aunts and grandmothers." Such methods of argument are frequent with him. "We hear," he says, "of essentially Protestant governments and essentially Christian governments, words

which mean just as much as essentially Protestant cookery or essentially Christian horsemanship." "For our part, if we are compelled to make our choice between the first shoemaker and the author of the three books on Anger, we pronounce for the shoemaker." In this spirit is the whole attack on speculative philosophy. But ridicule is a weapon which a great critic will use sparingly. It is so easy to make sport for the Philistines. Macaulay's rhetoric is better when it soars than when it flutters in this fashion. ✓

His strong attachments and dislikes are matter of common fame. His attitude to Boswell is still a puzzle. Johnson himself, in his *Journey to the Hebrides* pays flattering compliments to the "acuteness of intellect" and "civility of manners" of his biographer. At the inn in Aberdeen, he says, "we had some difficulty in obtaining admission till Mr Boswell made himself known; his name overpowered all objection, and we found a very good house and civil treatment." "Mr Boswell," he elsewhere

remarks, "between his father's merits and his own is sure of a reception wherever he comes." And Carlyle, in reply to Macaulay, pointed out that Boswell was "heir to an honourable name and a great estate"; that to associate with Johnson was a social condescension on his part, and no "sycophancy." But Boswell courted the company of great men, especially of Johnson and Paoli. His enthusiasm for the former was certainly very great. But we know enough about him to be quite sure that respect, and not simpleness, inspired it. Despite all these facts, Macaulay somehow took a notion that Boswell was a vulgar fellow; and in characteristic fashion he speaks his mind outright in paradoxes that only make us stare. Boswell was a great genius because he was a great dunce! His intellectual capacity was not above that of a boy of fifteen, yet he wrote what is, without a rival, the greatest biography in the world! He was a bigot, a coxcomb, and a sot, yet he was the friend of Johnson and Reynolds and Burke

himself! No attempt is made by Macaulay to reason these paradoxes.

Critical helplessness, as Mr Morison says, could go no further. He disliked Boswell as Martial disliked Sabidius:—

Non amo te, Sabidi, nec possum dicere quare;  
Hoc tantum possum dicere, non amo te.

Nor is his aversion to Xenophon any better founded. He was a "good young man" who "had a weak head"; given to "toothless mumbling," "stammering, tottering, helpless," as an infant in knowledge. His dislike of Marlborough and Penn is equally strange. And his loves are not less deserving of note. Among the Latin poets he preferred Plautus, among the moderns he thought Locke the greatest philosopher; of Kant he speaks with airy and superior contempt. In his somewhat sentimental "Lines in August," he aspires to place himself in the company of so odd a foursome as Bacon, Hyde, Raleigh, and Milton. Such impressionability, such fastidious nicety,

foreclosed many a question to his reason. And he was little given to second thoughts. In many of his criticisms there is therefore a felt want of nerve.

Twin with this fault, and but the other aspect of it, is a fault of the reason. He was not a strong nor a courageous thinker. He was, it must be confessed, a man of considerable intellectual indolence and inertia. He avoids problems. When he must face them, he solves them out of his vast memory rather than by the light of his own mental vision. Hence his judgments are apt to be haphazard, superficial, and inconsistent. He is neither a systematic nor a methodical reasoner. In description he is brilliant and inspiring; but when he attempts the height of a high argument, his failure is most marked. The whole training of his mind was against strenuous and profound thought. It was his touch and his taste that were cultivated by his habits of study. He roved through literature as through a fair landscape,

ceaselessly retraversing it for the love of the exercise, but averse to tempting new paths of his own. He read and admired ; but his glance was too wholly retrospective. He was fond of this dalliance in the pleasant meadows ; but he avoided the steep paths which lead to the heights. It is said that as a child he read on the hearthrug, stretched at full length, his heels in the air, and a slice of bread and butter in his hand. This image suits him well even in his later days. It is fancy and feeling rather than philosophy and science that lead him to literature. At College, he entirely neglected, to his after regret, a scientific training. Even if the mathematical sciences were as dull and passionless as he found them to be, yet the patient plodding of their methods is one of the best disciplines of the mind. Macaulay lacked this discipline. Those therefore who seek charm in his *Essays on literature* will find it in abundance ; they will feel the touch of a scholar, the finished art of a stylist who sees the beauty of

truth and can reflect it in language. But in this surfeit of the feelings they will find the reason greatly denied, except where it is shocked. The best sinews of the mind are wearied by restraint, or irritated by the easy exercise of destroying the fabrics which Macaulay pretends to raise. The thoughts flow too quickly to run deeply. Some of his Essays—on Milton, on Byron, on Dryden, on Bacon—are bright and rapid like the ripple of a stream in the sunlight.

None of his admirers but wishes he had never penned the unhappy essay on Bacon. The critique of speculative philosophy is a piece of work which can only be marvelled at. Its whole tone and temper, no less than its obvious ✓ superficiality, have gravely injured his repute as a critic. It is not easy to deal with it. There is a story in Scott's *Talisman*, of how Richard the Lionhearted and Saladin met in Palestine together in presence of their suites. A silver mace, the thickness of a man's wrist, lay on a

table in their midst. As a feat of strength, Richard raised his sword, and to the wonder of all severed it in two. Saladin, not to be outdone, brought a cushion, so soft that it could hardly stand upright, and turning to Richard asked if he could cut that in sunder also. "Nay," replied Cœur de Lion, "for man cannot overcome that which offers no resistance to the blow." But Saladin with a small toy of a sabre, split the cushion with a cunning stroke. Richard's answer is that which suits us best in dealing here with Macaulay; to employ subtleties of argument would only be to give his words the appearance of requiring careful scrutiny. To every thinking man the absurdity of Macaulay's reasoning is on the surface. We have only to reflect that the attack is calculated to destroy not philosophy only but all the humane sciences, and religious thought with them. "Words and more words and nothing but words"—this is his comment on the successors of Socrates. Let us ask a plain question. Plato discovered that the things



that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal. Newton discovered the law of gravitation. Which truth is of the greater value? Judged even on the low level of utility, which has done more to increase the happiness and diminish the sorrow of life? To ask this question is to answer it. But all reflection vanishes in impatience at Macaulay's treatment of logical science. "Every man of sense," he says, "syllogises all day long without suspecting it; and the inductive process is not likely to be better performed merely because men know how they perform it. For a drayman calls out in a passion, 'You are a pretty fellow,' without suspecting that irony is a primary trope." It is strange that a man of culture should really reason thus. As every schoolboy knows, logic does not teach us how we do argue, which is matter of psychology, but how we ought to argue, which is quite another matter. If there is no need of logic because all men syllogise all day long, there is no need of medicine either,

since all men live all day long. But though those that are whole need not a physician, those that are sick do. When we are all infallible popes we shall not require induction, nor any other kind of logical science. But so long as there is a difference between how we do argue and how we ought to argue, a difference of which Macaulay is ridiculously careless, we shall require logic just as we require the physician. And all this should not require to be insisted on.

That Macaulay did in the same fashion discount all serious religious thought we know from another Essay—that on *Von Ranke's History of the Popes*. He here argues that because the revelation of Scripture was given once for all, therefore the creed must be stereotyped, and our interpretation of its meaning and mystery must for ever be the same. The progress of thought is to reveal nothing new in the old story. “A Christian of the fifth century with a Bible is neither better nor worse situated

than a Christian of the nineteenth century with a Bible, candour and natural acuteness being supposed equal....Of the dealings of God with man no more has been revealed to the nineteenth century than to the first, or to London than to the wildest parish in the Hebrides. It is true that in these things which concern this life and this world man constantly becomes wiser and wiser. But it is no less true that as regards a higher power and a future state man, in<sup>o</sup> the language of Goethe's scoffing fiend,

‘Bleibt stets von gleichem Schlag,  
Und ist so wunderbar als wie am ersten Tag.’

In matters religious, he says in the History, the difference is slight between Aristotle and a child. Nor is natural religion any more progressive than revealed. For the evidences of design in the world are now as they were in the beginning, and as they shall be for ever! Surely, we may reply, design is just that which cannot be revealed except through change in time; which is not manifested at this moment or at

that, but is unfolded from age to age in a long development ; it is purpose that is worked out through the years. Are not these odd and nerveless beliefs to come from a man like Macaulay? We can only wonder at words so devoid of weight. If we ask for his own attitude to religion, he tells us, in his *Essay on Southey's Colloquies*, that :—"We too rely on God's goodness, on His goodness as manifested, not in extraordinary interpositions, but in those general laws which it has pleased Him to establish in the physical and moral world. We rely on the natural tendency of the human intellect to truth, and on the natural tendency of society to improvement." This is not consistent with the words quoted above ; but, such as it is, it is his vindication of his intellectual receptiveness, of his aversion to all the pressing problems of human life and destiny. It is an easy philosophy.

In justice to Macaulay, however, we cannot pass over the charge that his critique of specula-

tive thought, taken together with that of the Utilitarian philosophy, brings us only to an intellectual *impasse*. There are the two ways of thinking, it is said—the speculative and the utilitarian; in the Essay on Bacon, Macaulay bars the former; in the Essays on Mill he bars the latter. This is not a fair statement. Macaulay is a consistent enough utilitarian; it is not the system which the latter Essays reject, but the abstract and deductive method practised by a certain sect. It is not their conclusion, but their method, from which he differs.

In nothing is the conflict of Macaulay's imagination with his reason more clearly seen than in his attitude to Roman Catholicism. In spite of trenchant criticism, he has still a hankering after the rites and ceremonies, and all the external beauties of the worship of that Church. Although he believes that "to stunt the progress of the human mind has everywhere been its object," yet he cannot turn his eyes from its

"fair humanities." "It has enriched sculpture and painting with the loveliest and most majestic forms. To the Phidian Jupiter it can oppose the Moses of Michael Angelo; and to the voluptuous beauty of the Queen of Cyprus the serene and pensive loveliness of the Virgin Mother. The legends of its martyrs and its saints may vie in ingenuity and interest with the mythological fables of Greece; its ceremonies and processions were the delight of the vulgar; the huge fabric of secular power with which it was connected attracted the admiration of the statesman." (*On Dante.*) And with what a magnificent panorama of this Church does he open the *Essay on Von Ranke*! All this is, in his own words on Milton, "the very struggle of the noble Othello. He kisses the beautiful deceiver before he destroys her."

Macaulay's main positive contribution to literary criticism is his theory of poetry. It too is open to the same charge—to satisfy the imagination it denies the reason. His imagi-

nation is like a cork float that will not let his reason sink. He held that, as civilisation advances, poetry declines; for the advance of civilisation is the growth of reason, and this implies the decay of the imagination. But imagination is the poetic faculty *par excellence*. The child is the true poet. The man's reason and culture are against him. And so it is the early ages which produce the greatest poets. "He who in an enlightened age aspires to be a great poet must first become a little child. He must unlearn much of that knowledge which has perhaps constituted his chief title to superiority. He must take to pieces the whole web of his mind. His very talents will be a hindrance to him....And it is well if after all his sacrifices and exertions his work do not resemble a lisping man or a modern ruin." (*On Milton*.) Was ever such a paradox stated before? Poetry is to be the monopoly of barbaric and rude minds, capable of all the extravagancies of fancy and superstition—of Homeric heroes, of

trees which speak, of blood that spouts and bones that are shattered, of giant-killers and fairy wands. That deep insight into the mystery of things which comes with time, is to be put aside for this! Truly enough, as the reason grows, the imagination decays—but in what way? Surely in the way of being chastened and limited in credulity by experience. But at the same time it becomes more profound. The early imagination is purely scenic. It differs in kind, not merely in degree, from the late-developed and reason-born imagination which feels,

“A sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused ;  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the heart of man ;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.”

This is poetic feeling at its truest and deepest. It is the product of civilisation. It is impossible to the child or to the poet of an early day. Not



unnaturally, Macaulay found that facts were wayward and would not stay by his theory. Great poetical and creative works have been produced even in an enlightened age, that are triumphs of imagination. With such, Macaulay takes strong measures. They are, he asserts, the work of "uneducated men," like Bunyan or Burns; by "uneducated" being meant, apparently, unskilled in literary criticism. This is but poor thanks to Burns or Bunyan. But these are not the only difficult instances. What of the poetic genius of Dante, Goethe, and Schiller, all of whom are also critics? Or let us ask a question that is crucial,—would *Paradise Lost* have been a greater poem if Milton had been an uneducated man? But not even can Macaulay be consistent with such a theory. Writing on Dante, he says: "The orthodox poetical creed is more Catholic. The noblest earthly object of the contemplation of man is man himself. The universe and all its fair and glorious forms are indeed included in the wide empire of the imagi-

nation ; but she has placed her home and her sanctuary amidst the inexhaustible varieties and the impenetrable mysteries of the human mind." We may well ask whether the growth of reason and the advance of time increase or lessen our knowledge of man himself?

It is under the influence of a purely pictorial imagination that Macaulay is betrayed into such errors. But this great fault, his lack of depth and insight, is closely connected with his most signal merit. For vividness of touch he has few rivals. Some of his Essays are sketches from life. We could almost paint Johnson out of Macaulay. It is in the excess of this virtue that his characteristic failing lies. His imagination was too light to sink. His reason was too sluggish to rise. He has told us in a letter that he had no skill of probing beneath the surface of literary charm, keen though his appreciation was of charm itself. We shall do him no injustice therefore by the assertion that it is in vividness of touch, in grace of presentment,

in the power to display the beauties of literature, that the merit of his literary critiques lies. So far as their subject-matter is concerned, most of them have by now served their purpose. Yet the perusal of them still fascinates. And after all his diatribes on philosophy and all his odd paradoxes are forgotten, the grace of his *Addison*, the brilliance of his *Byron*, the warm enthusiasm of his *Milton*, will remain to stimulate the love of letters, and to convey from himself to his reader something of

“The sense of beauty and the thirst of truth.”

If he cannot analyse charm he can at least impart it. “And after all,” as Professor Saintsbury has said, “what is the good of seeking for the reason of charm?—it is there. There were better sense in the sad mechanic exercise of determining the reason of its absence where it is not.” (Introduction to Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.) Nor is it only in finesse of touch that Macaulay excels. He writes also

with a conscious mastery over immense stores of knowledge. In his own words on Addison, "he was the possessor of a vast mine rich in a hundred ores." He carries us, from any point, all over a wide field of literature, with the delight of one who shows its beauties to a stranger. And he does so with a wealth of allusion, of happy illustration, which opens glimpses of still broader and richer fields behind. We are agreed that to delight and stimulate the fancy is not everything; but it is a great deal. And no higher tribute can be paid to the fascination of Macaulay's scholarship, or to his life-likeness as an impressionist, than is implied in the fact that, despite faults which might well have spelt ruin to a critic, his essays on literature are still a brilliant and delightful page.

In the historical and political essays, we find the same merits, but with less of their accompanying lack of weight in treatment. They reveal in a high degree the same power of vivid and realistic description, which burns

scenes and events deep into the mind. In them Macaulay's great art of scenic description begins to be displayed to us. With a greater scope for it, he revels in it with the freedom of conscious strength. Few passages are better known than his living description of the opening of the trial of Hastings; colour is heaped upon colour, figure upon figure is painted in, finer and still finer brushes are used, till the whole waiting multitude is before us with the presence of to-day. Word-painting has rarely been carried to higher perfection. Neither Carlyle nor Michelet has excelled it. There are only two scenes which it recalls, and for different reasons; the trial of Rebecca, for the similarity of the scene; Burke's description of Marie Antoinette for the living power of the language. Hardly less splendid is the panorama with which his *Essay on Von Ranke* is opened. Of the Church of Rome he says: "No other institution is left standing which carries the mind back to the times when the smoke of sacrifice

rose from the Pantheon, and when camelopards and tigers bounded in the Flavian amphitheatre. The proudest of royal houses are but of yesterday when compared with the line of the Supreme Pontiffs.... Nor do we see any signs which indicate that the term of her long dominion is approaching. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot in Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished in Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St Paul's." This is the perfection of historical description.

We have less reason in these Essays to complain of want of depth of treatment. Macaulay is sounder as a political critic, and this despite his strong party bias. He thinks most safely where the reference to facts is constant. His

speeches are perhaps more full of sound political reflection than any other part of his work ; but there is more of it in the Essays than in the History. He here reveals the true historical spirit, often under very fine figures. No better simile of our national progress could be found than that used in his review of *McIntosh*, an essay which is strangely neglected by Macaulay's critics: "The motion of the public mind in our country resembles that of the sea when the tide is rising. Each successive wave rushes forward, breaks, and rolls back ; but the great flood is steadily coming in. A person who looked on the waters only for a moment might fancy that they were retiring. A person who looked on them only for five minutes might fancy that they were rushing capriciously to and fro. But when he keeps his eye on them for a quarter of an hour and sees one seamark disappear after another, it is impossible for him to doubt of the general direction in which the ocean is moved. Just such has been the course of events in

England." Would that Macaulay's History retained this spirit, or that of the Essay on Hallam! That he were less heedful of the ripples and more careful to mark the swelling of the whole ocean! The Essays at least reveal to us that he did not err from ignorance of what the historical attitude properly is.

It would be to no purpose to argue here the question of the partizanship of these reviews, and that for an obvious reason. Were the battles of Whig and Tory old and fought out long ago, we should not compromise ourselves by passing judgment on a Whig-reviewer. But such is not the case. It is the nature of our constitution that its development is still, and will be always, the resultant of the same old forces of progress and of caution. Time does not remove us, nor did it remove Macaulay, to a position whence we may view this strife unbiassed. And therefore to applaud or condemn would in this case only be to argue ourselves Whigs or Tories. But since what is



called the party spirit of these Essays is supposed to cast reflections on the worth of the History, a word may profitably be said from this point of view. We do find in these papers a most whole-hearted enthusiasm for Whig principles. The final words of that on Hallam point, with a note of warning, to the "more excellent way" of Reform. There is a tone of warm admiration in his treatment of Hampden and Chatham. In the essay on McIntosh the progress of English freedom is identified with the triumphs of the Whigs. And yet I think we ought not to neglect a development in Macaulay's opinions through the Essays, and one which is consummated in the opening of the History itself. In the papers written in the heat of the great battle his tone is strong, and his words are trenchant; but as he shook off the dust of the strife, his manner becomes graver, and he pleases the party politicians less. I shall only choose two passages, one from the Essay on the Spanish Succession, written in 1833, when feeling still

ruled high, the other eleven years later. In 1833 he writes: "Society, we believe, is constantly advancing in knowledge. The tail is now where the head was some generations ago. But the head and the tail still keep their distance. A nurse of this century is as wise as a justice of the quorum and custalorum in Shallow's time. The wooden spoon of this year would puzzle a senior wrangler of the reign of George II. A boy from the National School reads and spells better than half the knights of the shire in the October Club. But there is still as wide a difference as ever between justices and nurses, senior wranglers and wooden spoons, members of Parliament and children at charity schools. In the same way though a Tory now may be very like what a Whig was a hundred and twenty years ago, the Whig is as much in advance of the Tory as ever. The stag who 'feared his hind feet would o'ertake the fore,' was not more mistaken than Lord Mahon, if he thinks that he has really come up with the Whigs.

The absolute position of the parties has been altered ; the relative position remains unchanged. Through the whole of the great movement which began before these party names existed and which will continue after they have become obsolete,...there have been under some name or other two sets of men, those who were before their age, and those who were behind it, those who were the wisest among their contemporaries, and those who gloried in being no wiser than their great-grandfathers." Contrast with this his words in 1844, on Chatham : " If, rejecting all that is merely accidental, we look at the essential characteristics of the Whig and the Tory, we may consider each of them as the representative of a great principle, essential to the welfare of nations. One is, in an especial manner, the guardian of liberty, and the other of order. One is the moving power and the other the steady power of the State. One is the sail without which there would be no progress, the other the ballast without which there would

be small safety in a tempest." With this development of opinion compare finally the attitude with which the History opens: "The distinction has always existed and always must exist. For it has its origin in diversities of temper, of understanding, and of interest, which are found in all societies, and which will be found till the human mind ceases to be drawn in opposite directions by the charm of habit and by the charm of novelty....In the sentiments of both classes there is something to approve. But of both the best specimens will be found not far from the common frontier." (Chap. I.) So evident a movement from the position of an advocate to that of a judge should not be overlooked. They are guilty of a hasty inference who base their charge against the History on the alleged partizanship of the Essays.

But of greater importance than their matter, is the new method on which his historical reviews were written. He gave historical criticism literary form. It ceased to consist of

parallel extracts and discussions of authorities. It became an extract from history treated with literary finish. The characteristic of the Essay I take to be a certain freedom and broadness of treatment, in contrast to the closer following of the facts which is the mark of history. The historian must narrate facts in the first place, and interweave criticism and reflection with his tale ; but the essayist must be for the most part and primarily reflective and comparative. His account of facts must be the minimum which is necessary and sufficient ; he must be skilled in taking facts for granted, without seeming to desert them. Such was Macaulay's new method. He took periods of history and treated them with the freedom of an impressionist ; his facts are sketched in rapidly and generally. The essays on Hallam and Hampden are good examples of this. His *Mirabeau* is altogether taken up with broad reflections, with the political setting of his subject, rather than with an account of the subject itself. Macaulay's

art lies in making the background neither so full as to hide the central figure nor so scant as not to explain it. It lies, too, in the power to gather up the threads which link his theme with the past, to take a fragment out of history without leaving its borders ragged. His political essays are studies which can be read as closed wholes even by laymen in history. They have been well called "vignettes" from the past.

To the historical reviews will be attached, in my view, the greater part of Macaulay's critical repute properly so called. They are still standard authorities for the periods they cover; while their style redeems them from the dryness of history. Some work, like that on *Clive* and *Hastings*, he did pretty much once for all. There is one figure which seems to me to express better than any other the value of such work—a figure used by Sir W. Hamilton in another reference. These Essays are like strongholds which keep conquered land for the possession of the human mind, great towers

raised all along the line of march. They hold for each of us our lines of communication, and secure our further advance. They are centres from which we sally out and to which we can return. The intervening spaces are easily held down. And even when time, which continually shows the imperfections of the past, has mouldered the structure of Macaulay's work, these Essays will still be grand and stately edifices. Some will wear longer than others—his *Clive* and his *Hastings* perhaps longest of all. But after their immediate purpose is served, and we hold all the fields of history under some easier rule yet to be invented, they will still be works of art, and their influence will be felt in some of the best products of future labour. On this basis rests most securely the critical fame of Macaulay.

His biographies do not call for a great deal of remark. We find in them the characteristic marks of the Biography as distinguished from the Essay—less discursiveness, less freedom of

treatment, a sterner adherence to the order of facts. Yet the light touch of the Essays reasserts itself, especially in the *Lives of Goldsmith and Johnson*. Taken as a whole, however, this part of Macaulay's work is unequal; the method of his *Atterbury* and his *Pitt* being different from that of the two lives already mentioned. Bunyan and Johnson had already been treated in the Essays, and there are only the slightest modifications of opinion in the *Lives*. *Atterbury* is almost of too small importance to have deserved so much of the time which Macaulay could ill spare. With the exception of his stately monument to Pitt, and perhaps his *Johnson*, it is doubtful if the biographies will greatly add to his reputation.

Macaulay had so constantly cried down the biographer's error in the Essays, at the same time at which he was committing a similar fault himself, that we turn with interest to see whether the later style of his own biographies is free from it. To borrow superlatives from Cicero



seemed to him to be the darling sin of biography. Yet it must be allowed that from this failing he is little less free than other biographers, and scarcely less as a biographer than as an essayist. He still loves the extreme. Years have not overcome his repugnance to the common place. Partly for the sake of style, partly because it is tiresome to find a man humdrum, partly because separate consideration is apt to be oblivious of comparison, his biographies are sprinkled with superlatives which start out of the page. By this mannerism the *Life of Pitt* is happily unstained.

Of Goldsmith we are told that "no writer was ever more uniformly agreeable." If this is not merely a drawing-room compliment, it is absurd. What of Addison? or of Shakespeare himself? But the biographer remembers to forget such comparisons. Goldsmith was agreeable; therefore no writer was ever more so. In the *Life of Johnson* all the extreme paradoxes about Boswell are retained, despite Carlyle's

reply; proof of how strong were Macaulay's impressions when once formed. His remarks on Johnson himself have also peculiar points. Johnson's *London* is "a stately and vigorous poem;" yet because there are flaws in *Irene*, therefore Johnson "had not the slightest notion of what blank verse should be." Because Johnson did not attempt to emend the text of Shakespeare, nor yet

"To find out three more points in Hamlet's soul  
As yet untouched by Germans,"

therefore, "it would be difficult to name a more slovenly, a more worthless edition of any great classic." And nothing is more interesting than to compare the passages of Boswell with the versions of them which occur in this Essay. One sees then what a dangerous coquetry was Macaulay's love of style. Many, too, will demur from his judgment that Goldsmith's *Traveller* has the simplest and noblest plan of any didactic poem in the world. We cannot exempt Macaulay from the suspicion of infection

by the *lues Boswelliana* ; though in his case the disease has special symptoms, and manifests itself in many extremes which are not extremes of praise.

The biographies, we said, are unequal. Some of them, those of Goldsmith and Johnson in particular, are so full of colour and lively incident as to remind us strongly of the touch of Plutarch himself. "It is not always," says Plutarch, "in the most distinguished achievements that men's virtues or vices may be best discerned ; but very often an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, will distinguish a person's real character more than the greatest sieges or the most important battles. Therefore, as painters labour the likeness in the face, and especially about the eyes, and run over the rest more lightly, so must we be allowed to strike off the features of the soul, and leave to others the circumstantial detail of their labours and achievements." (On *Alexander*: init.) In the Lives referred to this is the method followed by Macaulay. They are

free and sketchy, and dwell on small points. In fact, writing to Napier in 1842 regarding his *Frederic the Great*, Macaulay says: "I shall try to give a life of him after the manner of Plutarch. That, I think, is my *forte*." We have seen reason why we should endorse this opinion; for a gay and lively imagination of events was Macaulay's most excellent faculty; he had just the genius of describing a man's life by suggestive touches here and there, rather than by psychological analysis or any interior treatment of his mind. Johnson's grimaces and gestures and mutterings, his twitching off of a lady's shoe, his ejaculations of the Lord's Prayer, his touching of the lamp-posts, his rapacious appetite, his wig and snuff-coloured coat—all this is in the style congenial to Macaulay's powers. He did not get inside Johnson, and failed to grasp the religious bent of his mind. Therefore he does him some injustices, and his exterior treatment is in danger often of being too meagre. He does not reveal how deep Johnson's nature

really was, how splendid was the humility of his great mind, how fast his life was anchored to the hopes of Christian faith, how true of him are the lines :

“Ah! those unspoken thoughts, which made  
The inner man we never knew,  
And all that in the genial shade  
Of his great nature lived and grew,  
From far-off founts their nurture drew.”

*(W. G. Hole.)*

But the circumstantial account which he gives of Johnson is lifelike and admirable, with many a true note of sympathy. His Goldsmith is after the same style, with characteristically Plutarchian touches here and there. This passage is typical: “How little Goldsmith was qualified to write about the physical sciences is sufficiently proved by two anecdotes. He on one occasion denied that the sun is larger in the Northern than in the Southern signs. It was vain to cite the authority of Maupertuis. ‘Maupertuis!’ he cried, ‘I understand these matters better than Maupertuis.’ On another

occasion he, in defiance of his own senses, maintained obstinately and even angrily that he chewed his dinner by moving his upper jaw."

The *Life of Pitt*, on the other hand, shakes off all that is familiar, and is written with a grave and lofty dignity. The style and method place it by itself among all his shorter works. It is by far the greatest of his monographs. There is no colour, none of that appeal merely to the eye of the mind, which marks Macaulay so peculiarly ; it is all in the sombre grey of public life, in the reserved manner of the Cabinet and the House of Commons. It has a stateliness, a tone of high endeavour, which interpret the author's distant reverence for one of his own heroes. It is the echo in prose of Scott's fine tribute to

"His worth who, in his mightiest hour,  
A bauble held the pride of power :  
Spurned at the sordid lust of pelf  
And served his Albion for herself ;  
Who, when the frantic crowd amain  
Strained at subjection's bursting vein,

O'er their wild mood full conquest gained,  
The pride, he would not crush, restrained,  
Showed their fierce zeal a worthier cause,  
And brought the freeman's arm to aid the freeman's  
laws."

It is the mature expression of Macaulay's own  
early lines of youthful enthusiasm :

"Remember the man who in sorrow and danger  
When thy glory was set and thy spirit was low,  
When thy hopes were o'eturned by the arms of the  
stranger,  
And thy banners displayed in the halls of the foe,  
Stood forth in the tempest of doubt and disaster,  
Unaided and single, the danger to brave,  
Asserted thy claims, and the rights of his master,  
Preserved thee to conquer and saved thee to save."

This martial spirit, which suits well the portrayal  
of a great man wrestling with a great crisis, is  
finely maintained in the biography. It is difficult  
to choose extracts ; but the following passage is  
a good example :

"While his schemes were confounded, while  
his predictions were falsified, while the coalitions  
which he had laboured to form were falling to  
pieces, while the expeditions which he had sent

forth at enormous cost were ending in rout and disgrace, while the enemy against whom he was feebly contending was subjugating Flanders and Brabant, the Electorate of Mentz, and the Electorate of Treves, Holland, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, his authority over the House of Commons was constantly becoming more and more absolute. There was his empire. There were his victories, his Lodi and his Arcola, his Rivoli and his Marengo. If some great misfortune, a pitched battle lost by the allies, the annexation of a new department to the French Republic, a sanguinary insurrection in Ireland, a mutiny in the fleet, a panic in the City, a run on the Bank, had spread dismay through the ranks of his majority, that dismay lasted only till he rose from the Treasury bench, drew up his haughty head, stretched his arm with commanding gesture, and poured forth in deep and sonorous tones the lofty language of inextinguishable hope and inflexible resolution. Thus through a long and calamitous period, every



disaster that happened without the walls of Parliament was regularly followed by a triumph within them. At length he had no longer an opposition to encounter."

This is splendid writing. There is no tinsel and no rhetoric. In this, the last of his articles, Macaulay somewhat shakes off his old and fanciful self, and wears a graver and more pensive aspect. His *Pitt* is well fitted to stand in the company of such tributes of reverence as Tennyson's great mausoleum to the memory of Hallam. Though—and perhaps, some will say, because—it departs from his old style and his old art, and is not representative of the characteristics most natural to Macaulay, it is of all his critical studies the ripest and the best.

The result which follows most generally from the study of Macaulay as a critic is this, that to strong tastes and an imagination sensitive and prone to the vivid and realistic he added a graceful and finished literary touch; and that in these characteristics is to be found the source

of great faults no less than of merits equally as great. Our study of his History will bear this judgment out.

There is a habit now of representing his History as a bizarre and brilliant *tour de force*, written on a wrong method and in a wrong spirit. Those who so regard him, as one who took his responsibilities too lightly, are predisposed to find him superficial where he is not, and to exaggerate the defects which undoubtedly exist. It must be insisted therefore that, as an historian, ✓ Macaulay prized his function highly. Ever since Thucydides penned the words that have rung in the ears of all his best successors—"no time-serving argument, but an eternal possession"—history, what is best of it, has assumed an air of serious ambition and has reached out toward high and conscious ideals. Of this spirit Macaulay is full. His enthusiasm, as revealed in the Essay on History, is strong and deep. It is therefore not the fairest method of judging him which prefaces its criticism with a text taken

from a private letter, in which Macaulay writes :  
“I have at last begun my historical labours....  
The materials for an amusing narrative are  
immense. I shall not be satisfied unless I  
produce something which shall for a few days  
supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables  
of young ladies.” On these words Mr Morison  
makes the following comment, as introductory  
to a general discussion of the History: “We  
did not need this intimation to make us ac-  
quainted with the chief object which the writer  
had in view ; but it is satisfactory to have it, as  
now no doubt remains on the subject. This then  
was Macaulay’s polestar by which he guided his  
historical argosy over the waters of the past—  
young ladies for readers, laying down the novel  
of the season to take up his *History of England*.”  
Whatever may be Macaulay’s faults as an his-  
torian, this is surely an entirely false keynote of  
criticism.

His historical aim was not onefold but  
twofold. His ideal was not fascinating narration

alone; though the neglect of this by modern historians led him to lay great emphasis upon it. He has told us times without number, in the official *Essay on History* and throughout the *Essays*, that like a good Whig he sought a compromise. He saw historical novelists and political philosophers working on independent lines; sometimes, as in Sismondi's case, he saw the same man pursue in different works the different studies. This separation was, in his view, a distinct confession of failure. History he conceived to be neither an abstract science nor a pleasing tale, but the harmonious union of these two; it is a narrative, but a narrative told reflectively. Whether or not, in the *History* itself, one of these aspects is developed so as to stunt the other, is a question for discussion; but of this there can be no discussion, that in Macaulay's own opinion each of these was of equal importance with the other. History was the seamless web of which political philosophy was the warp and facts themselves the woof.

To separate the two was to avow the lack of the power to interweave them, on the excellence of which was staked the value of what was properly called history. "A truly great historian," he says, in one of many statements of his aim, "would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated. The history of the government and the history of the people would be exhibited in that mode in which alone they can be exhibited justly, in inseparable conjunction and intermixture. We should not then have to look for the wars and votes of the Puritans in Clarendon and for their phraseology in *Old Mortality*; for one half of King James in Hume, and for the other half in the *Fortunes of Nigel*." "History, at least in its state of ideal perfection is a compound of poetry and philosophy. It impresses general truths by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents." And it is fortunate that in yet another place Macaulay mentions "the last novel" in comparison with his work, in a

passage which shows at once that "amusing narrative" was not his sole or chief aim. Writing on McIntosh's pamphlet he says: "We find in it the diligence, the accuracy, and the judgment of Hallam, united to the vivacity and colouring of Southey. A history of England written throughout in this manner would be the most fascinating book in the language. It would be more in request at the circulating libraries than the last novel." These public statements seem to me to discount entirely any emphasis that may be laid on the less deliberate words of a private letter. History, in Macaulay's view, was not the same thing as political philosophy nor the same as narration; it was the union of the two, the common treasure from which the specialists in philosophy and story-telling drew their materials.

Macaulay's emphasis on the artistic side of history is certainly very marked. There are two reasons for this. The first was the

influence of classical models, which seemed to him not to have forgotten that history was literature, and with whose spirit he was thoroughly inspired. But a greater influence was that of the new ideas which at the beginning of this century were forcing their way. Several causes led to this development. There was the rise of the critical school with its analytic methods. Then the attention of the whole educated world had been called to a consideration of the principles of social life, and the summons had come from France in a form too terrible to be neglected. Furthermore, it was but recently that Adam Smith's great work had opened out a new and vast field of knowledge, that was of no speculative kind, but which was essential to every practical man of affairs. His work was carried forward by Malthus and Ricardo, and their developments were such as to give pause to all serious men. Even had it been less fearful in itself, the *Iron Law* must have

derived terrible significance from the state of England at that time. The poverty, the misery, the squalor of the lives of the working classes were only equalled by the repulsive conditions under which they laboured every day. To thousands who saw the people struggling to live the life almost of beasts of burden, the theories of the economists seemed only too true. And hence out of public discontent a great movement arose. Socialism spread like fire. It was no academic idea; it was preached to the people, in their alleys and filthy houses, by the people. They were taught to regard the capitalist, the aristocrat, and the upper levels of society, not as their enemies only, but as their despoilers; as men whose wealth was reared over the degradation of labour, whose happiness was the reward of theft and tyranny, whose right was might, the price of whose greatness was the people's blood and tears.

The result of all these movements was that



new problems were thrust into the daylight of political study; it was urgent that the constitution of society should be thoroughly sifted. The great historians, at home and abroad, set to work on new methods. Philosophical insight became a more important quality than clear and vigorous narration. Among such men Sismondi and Niebuhr were conspicuous, and with them Macaulay was contemporary. John Mill was publishing just as Macaulay took up his pen in his historical labours. The intellectual world was full of scientific ideas. What was their influence on Macaulay?

“Our modern historians miserably neglect the art of narration,”—this is his comment. They seemed to him to be trespassing on the bounds of political science. And in making history more scientific they were, he thought, unmaking it as literature. He was far from unaware of or indifferent to the philosophical principles of history; but their elaboration was the special study of a special science which along

with the science of the historical novelists, drew its materials from a common and less specialised storehouse called history. The moderns seemed to him to have forgotten the true harmony of parts in this central study. Looking at their work with the eyes of Thucydides, it seemed to him that it had become unlovely and unsplendid in the act of becoming profound.

Want of realistic treatment is his first complaint against the modern method. It is not his only complaint. The moderns seemed to him to have sacrificed for the sake of scientific depth, nearly all the other merits of history. "They have characteristic faults, so closely connected with their characteristic merits, that it may well be doubted whether on the whole this department of literature has gained or lost during the last two-and-twenty centuries."

The first ideal they had neglected was art. History proper "must be received by the imagination as well as by the reason. It must not be merely traced on the mind, but branded into it."

On this point Macaulay is reasserting the old ideal of Lucian. The mind of the historian, Lucian said, must be touched with poetic fire, especially in battles and sea-fights. He must have the art of the sculptor. "The raw material of facts is his gold or silver or ivory, which he has to carve and polish and weld into a shape of beauty; to arrange in lovely order the things that have been done, and to set them forth lit up with the white light and splendour of reality." "Facts," Macaulay says, "are the mere dross of history." His grudge against his contemporaries is that in probing for theories, they were content to lack altogether this art of description. They were dead to the beauty of the facts themselves.

The philosophical treatment was also by him held liable for a great deal of political partizanship. Principles are apt to be preconceived and to distort the meaning of history where facts are not also fully dwelt on. The moderns "have fallen into the error of distorting facts to suit

general principles. They arrive at a theory from looking at some of the phenomena; the remaining phenomena they strain at or curtail to suit the theory." Which of the phenomena they will look at, it is not difficult to guess. We get accomplished political advocates like Hume; in the midst of whose disputes, "history proper is disappearing. The high, grave, impartial summing up of Thucydides is nowhere to be found." Mr Morison makes too strong a statement in asserting that "it does not appear that Macaulay yielded to the silly notion that abstract history must necessarily be incorrect. All history is liable to be incorrect, and concrete as much as any." Macaulay was well aware of the latter fact, and has been at pains to indicate it; a history may be false, he says, in which every fact is true. But in abstract history he saw the greater danger, and he saw it in fact incurred. And so he repeats his warning in the opening of his own work. Abstractness

becomes political bias; and history becomes the "repository of title-deeds."

A third charge is want of fulness of treatment. We here strike on the idea most closely associated with Macaulay's historical work. History, he complains, is being limited to constitutional developments alone. It is the denizen only of the court and the senate. His own ideal was broader. History was to abandon her reserve, to leave the haughty precincts of kings, and come out among the people. It was to become comprehensive of every part of the national life. The perfect historian "shows us the court, the camp, and the senate, but he also shows us the nation. He considers no anecdote, no peculiarity of manner, no familiar saying as too insignificant for his notice which is not too insignificant to illustrate the operation of law, of religion, and of education, and to mark the progress of the human mind." "I shall cheerfully bear the reproach of having descended below the dignity of

history, if I can succeed in placing before the English of the Nineteenth Century a true picture of the life of their ancestors." In the philosophical method there was no scope for this fulness of detail. "They think it beneath the dignity," he says of the moderns, "of men who describe the revolutions of nations to dwell on the details which constitute the charm of biography. They have imposed on themselves a code of conventional decencies. The most characteristic and interesting circumstances are omitted because, we are told, they are too trivial for the majesty of history."

Such were Macaulay's ideals. His work in history is done on methods that are unique and peculiar to himself. He was in conscious disagreement from the ideas of modern historians. It is therefore an exaggeration to state that "he took no notice of the new history, showed no curiosity in what was being done in that direction." (Morison, ch. II.) On the contrary he was well aware of what was being done, but

it did not seem to be done as well as it might be. They believed the historic spirit to imply the detection of principles of political progress and life. He differed from them. He believed it to consist in an art of narration which should sacrifice neither the facts nor the principles. The *separate* study of principles alone, on the other hand, was political science and not history. It is on the value of the facts that he chiefly insists. They must be stated fully, to correct the false readings of theories; they must be stated well, for history is literature. He aimed at uniting a scientific with a literary treatment. The modern method was not false but inadequate. It was only the half of history. It was political without being social; descriptive but not literary; critical but not judicial.

A work so unique cannot be fairly criticised by anyone who assumes the standpoint of the moderns and accuses Macaulay of deficient historical spirit. To argue thus is to fight with a man of straw. Macaulay's method must not be

criticised on the principles of any other school, but on the intrinsic merits of his work as a history. And our judgment of so vast an undertaking should not overlook his own admission that his ideal, like all ideals, was set on a height: "A historian," he says, "such as we have been attempting to describe would be an intellectual prodigy. In his mind, powers scarcely compatible with each other must be tempered into an exquisite harmony. We shall sooner see another Shakespeare or another Homer."

One aim of Macaulay's method was a statement of facts so full as to avoid the danger of partial treatment, which besets the "abstract" histories. He wished less to argue principles than to leave the complete evidence with the reader, and allow him to draw his own conclusions. Yet it was in spite of everything inevitable, for reasons we have noticed already, that he should be charged with Whig partiality. While party government is with us under the



same old English forms, no historian is likely to escape this blame. It is an ancient story of the physician who advised his patient to read Macaulay's History, or some other pleasing work of fiction. But this is a charge from which he has on the whole been absolved.

The party spirit of the Essays, as we have seen, wore off as Macaulay's judgment ripened. And if we compare the Edinburgh speech of 1839, or the Reform speech of 1831, with the Edinburgh speech of 1852, the difference of tone is most marked. "In peace or in convulsion, by the law or in spite of the law, through the Parliament, or over the Parliament," he says in 1831, "Reform must be carried." But the following is characteristic of him, after that great struggle was over: "Let us prize our constitution; let us purify it; let us amend it; but do not let us destroy it. If we love civil and religious freedom, let us in the day of danger uphold law and order; if we are zealous for law and order, let us prize, as our best safeguard



of law and order, civil and religious freedom." (Edin. 1852.) Nor could any judgment be maturer than these early words of the History: "No man not utterly destitute of judgment and candour will deny that there are many deep stains on the fame of the party to which he belongs, or that the party to which he is opposed may justly boast of many illustrious names, of many heroic actions, and of many great services rendered to the State. The truth is that, though both parties have often seriously erred, England could have spared neither. If in her institutions freedom and order, the advantages arising from innovation and the advantages arising from prescription have been combined to an extent elsewhere unknown, we may attribute this happy peculiarity to the strenuous conflicts and alternate victories of two rival confederacies of statesmen, a confederacy zealous for authority and antiquity, and a confederacy zealous for liberty and progress." (Ch. I.) And although it is true that no one can close his work without

a thrill of admiration for the party and the Prince who vindicated our freedom in its darkest hour, it would still be difficult to point to any part of it where the politician gets the better of the historian. Macaulay had his antipathies to individuals. He has not done Marlborough justice; but I doubt if he has done him very serious injustice. In point of evidence his condemnation is wrong, but much less so in point of conclusion. But, individuals apart, every turn of the History shows party animosity well in hand. His criticism of the Whigs at the time of the Exclusion Bill is unsparing. His remarks on the clergy are offensively spoken, but Thackeray's Dr Tusher is not a pleasing picture. Over the Revolution itself there is no party paeon sung; there is only praise for the reformer who knew where to pause. There is no exultation over the schism in the Church, but only censure for the Whigs who rejoiced over it. There is no garbling of facts regarding the Junto; Russell was an undetected traitor; the

doubts on Somers' private life, dim enough as they are, are not concealed; Montague "had great faults, and unhappily faults not of the noblest kind"; Wharton is mercilessly exposed. The chiefs of the Tory party show best in this celebrated gallery of statesmen. Macaulay's tone well satisfies the words of Polybius: "A good man should be attached to his friends and to his country, and out of sympathy for these should hate their enemies and love their friends. But when a man assumes the attitude of mind that is proper to history, he is bound to leave out of sight all such considerations, and he must often speak well of his enemies and adorn them with the highest praises when the facts demand it; and again he must often blame his nearest friends and bring home their faults to them whenever their conduct requires. For if you take away the truth out of history what is left is merely an unprofitable tale." Some perhaps will not thank us for not taking Macaulay's impartiality for granted; but the hot conflict

of his political life would in itself require this vindication even of the author of the *Essay on History*.

The gravest doubts have been raised against Macaulay's new departure in historical method—his comprehensiveness of treatment. His criterion of historical data was a very broad one. The happiness of mankind he held to be the most general and elastic expression of the function of government (cf. on Mitford and *passim*). All that tended to promote this, in any sphere of life, was the historian's material; all the sources from which information regarding it could be drawn were his authorities. History must stand on no etiquette; it is her function "to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manner, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old-fashioned wardrobes." On this point, Thackeray's judgment must be added to Macaulay's: "The Muse of History," says Esmond, "hath encumbered her-

self with ceremony as well as her sister of the theatre. She too wears the mask and the cothurnus and speaks to measure. She too in our age busies herself only with the affairs of kings ; waiting on them obsequiously and stately, as if she were but a mistress of court ceremonies and had nothing to do with the registering of the affairs of the common people....I wonder shall History ever pull off her periwig and cease to be court-ridden? Shall we see something of France and England besides Versailles and Windsor?...Why shall History go on kneeling to the end of time? I am for having her rise up off her knees and take a natural posture....In a word, I would have history familiar rather than heroic ; and think that Mr Hogarth and Mr Fielding will give our children a much better idea of the manners of the present age in England than the Court Gazette and the newspapers which we get thence."

On this matter differences of opinion will be fundamental and final. Some will say with

Aristotle that the unity of the State is its polity, and that whatever does not bear with some degree of immediacy on the development of the polity is not history at all, but antiquities; all very interesting, but out of place. It belongs, they will say, to a specialist, just as do the histories of literature and science. History proper is political, the tale of how

"Freedom slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent."

Others will answer that there must be, as the centre and point of meeting of all the specialised studies, a history not of this or of that, but which draws together all the threads, showing the nation in the concrete as it is, not merely the separated aspects of it in the abstract. This will not be the history of politics, or of literature, or of science, or of fashion, but history plain and simple, with no adjective at all. They will say that without such a central study all the special studies are abstract and bloodless and in the air.

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Under strong influences, positive and negative, Macaulay chose the latter view. The magnitude of the task his choice set to him was immense. His method and his success must be judged solely by the result.

It has been objected to the Third Chapter, which unfolds the spectacle of a nation's life in one view, that it is defective in historical spirit, in that it compares the past, to its disparagement, with the present. Now plainly, an historian who sets himself to review the periods of national development, must begin somewhere; and the only time he can compare at the outset with that past with which he begins is the present. Further, such a comparison is surely that which will make the past most vivid, and which will throw its strange features into the sharpest relief. And surely there is nothing either new or shocking in the fact that such a comparison must disparage the past, at least in the sense of showing its inferiority to the present. We need waste no sentiment in bemoaning



that. And it ought further to be observed that Macaulay's review of England in 1685 is only the first, in all likelihood, of a number of such reviews which were intended ; the next period would have been compared, to its credit, with 1685.

Another "low-minded objection" may also be met. Mr Morison points out that the task Macaulay took in hand would, at his rate of working, have taken him a hundred and fifty years and fifty volumes to accomplish. "This," he says, "is almost a practical refutation of the method he adopted. And yet such an absurd result could not, on his principles, be avoided." And Mr Harrison points out that Gibbon wrote the history of a century in the space required by Macaulay for a single year. But let us not forget that Macaulay's ideal was a History which should be so full as to be exhaustive of the narrative of the period. Suppose that it would take fifty volumes to finish his period ; suppose that it would take a hundred and fifty

years of life. Let us ask—how many volumes have already been required for that period? how many years of life have collectively been given to it? There are many more than the sum charged against Macaulay; but had his method been carried on, a single vast work was to have taken the place of a multitude of lesser works. This technical objection can therefore be met on its own ground.

It is a better argument that the details of his History were not under sufficient control. It must be allowed that this assertion is well grounded. Development is not clearly enough traced; individuals and events have too great a share of the narrative. It is not that Macaulay was unaware of the ideas of social progress. Nor is it that the stages of progress are not marked down in his History. What sends us unsatisfied away is in part the want of emphasis upon them, but chiefly the absence of retrospective comparison. Macaulay rarely turns back to see the ground he has traversed. He

shows us the milestones; but he does not call on us to look from one toward the last, in order to get a view of our course as a whole. The milestones are not the most interesting things he has to show us; he indicates them, but then turns again to delight our vision with the colours of the scenery. We become oblivious of distance or direction. When we are come to our journey's end what we remember least is the road we journeyed on. Or, to adopt his own figure, though he shows us the ebb and flow of all the little waves of popular feeling, civil and religious, yet he fails to sufficiently call our attention to the rising of the whole tide, to

“Watch what main-currents draw the years.”

He continually displays the law by which the reactions of civil and religious feeling go from extreme to extreme—in 1660, in 1678, in 1681, in 1685: but the “still, sad music” is often drowned in these shoutings of his London crowds, with their “No Popery” and “Long live

the King." We are not criticising Macaulay on the principles of the modern schools; we are taking his own ideal of history and examining how he has lived up to it. Our complaint is that he has not kept a due proportion between the two aspects of history he sought to intertwine. It is his old error. His imagination is stronger than his reason; it is a scenic rather than an intellectual imagination. It lacks the ballast of central controlling ideas. Hence continuity of development is apt to be hidden in the History. The overtones sometimes drown the tune. In a nation as in an individual there is that within which passeth show; the interpretation of which requires a deeper imagination than that which loves the suits and trappings of life. A nation is an organism: its development must as such be traced. Yet even in his remarks on the Revolution as a whole, where surely a halt should have been called, Macaulay's treatment is painfully meagre. He gives himself up for the most part to a

rhetorical paean. Let it be understood where precisely the error lies. It is not in that Macaulay omits the notice of constitutional principles; it is in that the illuminating touch of retrospective comparison is lacking. The "philosophy of history" is there and it is dwelt on; but it is not continuously traced. Individuals are made to act with too great a degree of isolation from social movements of which they are but the expression. We may still reject the interpretation that Macaulay wrote a romance "for young ladies to read"—*his nam plebecula gaudet*. This was not his aim, and, spite of all, it is not the result. His History has many thoughtful touches, many reflections on the constitutional position. But it has not enough—that is the whole fault. The attention is apt to be held less on developments than on events.

Dum fugiunt equitum turmae peditumque catervae;  
Mox trahitur manibus regum fortuna retortis,  
Esseda festinant, pilenta, petorrita, naves,  
Captivum portatur ebur, captiva Corinthus.

Does this fault condemn the method? Mr Morley thinks it does. I hesitate to agree. A few strokes only are required to adjust the balance of the work. They might so easily have been added that their absence is vexatious. But it must at least be agreed that the work itself is a cripple, grandly arrayed, but still a cripple for the want of them.

And yet the fault is for many reasons a splendid one. Against it in the account must be placed the brilliant and unsurpassed variety of Macaulay's narrative. There is nothing equal to it for vividness in all the works of serious literature. Critics have exhausted metaphor in speaking of it. It is a drama, an oratorio, a mosaic, a field of the cloth of gold. Macaulay's native genius of description fairly revels amid the wonders of the great past of our country. He draws all the threads into one pattern of our national life. And between the lines there is pattern within and overlaid on pattern; threads crossed and interlaced, and all contributing their

moiety of colour. He gave to truth the vividness of fancy—*effecit ut vera fictis libentius legerentur*.

✓ | He made history a moving drama ; plot and underplot are fitted together. Indeed, if Carlyle's *French Revolution* has been well styled an epic, drama is the only apt term for Macaulay's *History of England* and for his presentment of William. As we close the record, scene upon scene rises up before us, all garnished with the splendour of great detail of circumstance. We see the thin and youthful figure of the Stadtholder. We see him at Salisbury, grave and unruffled amid many a faction, controlling, preparing, and waiting ; in the banqueting Hall, the crowned King of England ; wounded and victorious at the Boyne, or saving a lost day at Landen ; in the death-chamber of Mary ; amid those he could trust at Loo, at Whitehall amid perfidy and intrigue ; bursting all the meshes of treason, pressing with a single eye to one end, and laying down the sceptre amid the gathering clouds of crisis and of war. " A ring and a lock

of the hair of Mary"—these are the touches which make him real to us. Macaulay wrote ✓ history with enthusiasm. He worshipped Clio as a Muse. He carved the severe outlines and bare stones of her temple into reliefs of her battles, her revolutions, her coronations, her deaths. In the niches he set the statues of her dead with the pose and expression of life. Here, on this relief, we see the Bishops passing through a shouting populace; there is the battle of the Boyne, there is Sedgemoor, that kilted struggle is the treachery of Glencoe; there is the standard of Monmouth, and there the burning of Alice Lisle. In this niche are the dark harsh features of Danby; in that niche, the repulsive lineaments of Oates. Here is the serenity of Somers, and there is Jeffreys with his cruel sneer. And there, in his own high place of honour, is the slender figure, the high and pensive brow, the thin care-worn cheek, the eagle eye, the firm lip of William. All honour is due to Macaulay for the example of his work in history. He pressed into notice



a neglected ideal—an ideal which he was the very man to enhance. He made history live as few have done before him or since his time. Even those who deny his method would rather we had not been without his work.

✓ It is an interesting speculation whether Macaulay's success would not have been greater had he attempted the historical novel rather than history pure and simple. A work like *Esmond* would, one would think, have suited his genius admirably. He is so fond of the ramifications of history that it is almost strange he did not turn his mind and his imagination this way. Yet except for an admirable "Fragment of a Roman Tale," written at College in 1823, he left this mine unworked. The more we read his History, the more we reflect on the imaginative bent of his disposition, the more, I think, we ought to wonder whether the company of Scott and Thackeray was not more suited to him than that of Clarendon and Hume and Hallam. Certain it is, that his faults as an

historian are such as would have been his merits as an historical novelist.

No one except Gray has achieved equal poetic fame with Macaulay on so small a volume of poems. But Macaulay's fame depends on different qualities of mind. If we say that poets must be born and not made, I doubt if Macaulay is a poet at all. Yet the nation has chosen to honour him as such. Some enquiry is therefore needed into the nature of that style of poetry in which he excels.

We have already found it most fitting to classify Macaulay's genius as secondary, the distinction of this from primary literature being one of kind and not of degree. His poems well suit this classification. He is not a poet of the same order as Milton or Dante or Shakespeare; he has not

"The vision and the faculty divine."

His imagination is not creative, but reproductive. It is not by the mystic influence of fancy or deep insight that he affects us; it is by the force of

events as such to thrill us by the thought of them. He is a ballad poet.

Ballad poetry is the simple narration in verse of deeds which in themselves appeal to us. It is native to those early stages of life where imagination is still scenic and pictorial, before deep and serious views of life are in vogue, when the emotions of men are still only those of feudalism and romance—the emotions of love, and war, and the chase. The poetry of such men is but the versified tale of great deeds told plainly, without the consciousness that the tale of them is poetry at all. The ballad poet is “the bard of buoyancy, hope, heroism”; the chords of nature he plays on are those which in the struggle to live are earliest formed.

What then are the characteristics of such poetry? First among them is its simplicity. The ballad singer does not know he is a poet; he is full of his tale and eager to tell it. He speaks with the eagerness of a breathless messenger, who does not think of his words, but

only of his story. He hurries to its consummation, he thinks only of that, he may not stay, he has no time to wait. What we have, therefore, in all the old and native ballads is "the direct word, the unrestrained emotion ; a breathless, rushing narrative of a simple succession of events told with the utmost simplicity." As an old song has it, the ballad poets are

"Those venerable ancient song-enditers,"

who

"Soared many a pitch above our modern writers ;  
With rough majestic force they moved the heart,  
And strength and nature made amends for art."

A word and a blow were their ancient manners ;  
and their poetry stands on ceremony just as little.

To this simplicity of language is added an equal simplicity of feeling. There are no moral reflections in a ballad ; the poet has no time for that, even if he had the disposition. He leaves his tale to tell with its own effect. Morality in

a ballad would be like a discord in a tune ; it could not be more out of place. As beauty is spoiled by the consciousness of it, or wit by the indication of it, so is the ballad spoiled if the poet becomes a moralist. All this is alien to the age and spirit of such poetry. In the same way, there must be no exordium, no "sing Heavenly Muse," no "*μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά*," and no descriptions of scenery or circumstance to hinder the direct and rapid progress of the tale. The balladist plunges into his story and goes straight through with it. Take such characteristic openings as those of "Sir Patrick Spens" or "Keith of Ravelstone":

"The King sits in Dunfermline town  
Drinking the blude-red wine :  
'Oh, where will I get a skeely skipper  
To sail this ship o' mine?'"

and

"The murmur of the morning ghost  
That keeps the shadowy kine :  
'Oh, Keith of Ravelstone,  
The sorrows of thy line!'"

This is the same as is implied in saying that in

the ballad the poet obliterates himself. He tells only his tale. Ballad poetry is from its nature essentially objective. The lyric is the opposite extreme. And lastly, the emotions that are touched must be primitive, must be those of the age to which the ballad is native. Ballads are, in Warton's lines,

“The songs to savage virtue dear  
That won of yore the public ear,  
E'er Polity, sedate and sage,  
Had quenched the fire of feudal rage.”

It is plain that in the nineteenth century such poetry can exist only as a hothouse growth—as an exotic. The ballads of our time are imitations; they are no longer the spontaneous songs of the people, but the laborious products of the study. To write them requires a mastery of the difficult art of concealing art. An old ballad writer was unconscious that he was a poet; but a modern balladist must be highly self-conscious. He must consciously strive to throw off his highest emotions, and transfer

himself to a ruder frame of mind. He must criticise his work with a keen eye, lest any word betray the twentieth century. He is aware that it is artificial and forced.

That Macaulay's poems are exotics there can therefore be no question. We know with what labour they were polished and burnished into shape. The question for a critic is not whether they are forced growths, but whether, in spite of themselves, they reveal it; not whether they come from the study, but whether they smell of the lamp.

So far as their vigour is concerned, there can be but one opinion. It is free and fresh and thrilling. "I could scarcely read them," said Mrs Browning, "and keep lying down. They seemed to draw me up to my feet, as the mesmeric powers are said to do." "His ballads," says Mrs Humphrey Ward, "have the clear resonance, the metallic note, of the trumpet." Other questions apart, no ballad in our language stirs us like *Horatius*. Few

passages thrust at our feelings so directly as the speech of Icilius. To read it with appreciation is to go about frowning, and with a quick step, for half-an-hour after. In *Freedom*, Macaulay found his congenial Muse.

But by many characteristics the spirit of modernity betrays itself in the ballads of Macaulay, as in those of Scott. It is a mark of the ballad not to dwell on description, as of scenery. Nothing must delay the tale. Yet *Horatius* opens with such a description as perceptibly makes a pause in the action of the poem. Horatius at the bridge is the centre of this story; to his deed the tale ought to hasten; what would it have mattered to an old balladist where Porsena's troops came from? He would not have thought of dwelling on that. His tale would have begun with the lines:

“The Fathers of the City  
They sat all night and day,  
For every hour some horseman came  
With tidings of dismay.



To eastward and to westward  
Have spread the Tuscan bands,  
Nor house, nor fence, nor dovecote  
In Crustumerium stands."

Consider in the same way the opening of the *Battle of Lake Regillus*. The long reflective exordium is quite out of the ballad spirit. Without doubt, to preserve this spirit, we should start from these lines in the fifth stanza :

"The Herald of the Latines  
From Gabii came in state,  
The Herald of the Latines  
Passed through Rome's Eastern Gate,  
The Herald of the Latines  
Did in our Forum stand ;  
And there he did his office,  
A sceptre in his hand."

Anyone who will refer to the Old English Ballads will see at once how immediately they plunge us into the action, and how rapidly they take us through it. The opening of *Virginia* is truer to this old spirit.

Yet it must be granted that Macaulay has a manner of description which is his own, which is

consonant with all else we know of him, and which does not hold the attention at a halt as description of scenery in general does. He paints all his scenery in moving colours. It is not still life; it is all in action. It is for this reason that we are insensible to any pause in his ballads, where otherwise we certainly should feel it. Compare these descriptions:

“Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm;  
And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands;  
Beyond, red roofs about a narrow wharf  
In cluster; then a mouldered church; and higher,  
A long street climbs to one tall-towered mill;  
And high in Heaven behind it a gray down  
With Danish barrows; and a hazelwood,  
By autumn nutters haunted, flourishes  
Green in a cuplike hollow of the down.”

*(Enoch Arden: init.)*

and

“Tall are the oaks whose acorns  
Drop in dark Auser's rill,  
Fat are the stags that champ the boughs  
Of the Ciminian hill;  
Beyond all streams Clitumnus  
Is to the herdsman dear,  
Best of all pools the fowler loves  
The great Volsinian mere.

But now no sound of woodman  
Is heard by Auser's rill,  
No hunter tracks the stag's green path  
Up the Ciminian hill ;  
Unwatched, along Clitumnus  
Grazes the milk-white steer,  
Unharm'd, the waterfowl may dip  
In the Volsinian mere."

Both are descriptions of scenery ; and yet how different. The one is quiescent, the other all in terms of life and action. The latter is Macaulay's constant mode of description. He peoples his scenery : makes it, as it were, a function of personal activities. Take such passages as these :

"From lordly Volaterrae,  
Where scowls the far-famed hold  
Piled by the hands of giants  
For godlike Kings of old ;  
From seagirt Populonia,  
Whose sentinels descry  
Sardinia's snowy mountain tops  
Fringing the southern sky."

and

"The harvest of Aretium  
This year old men shall reap,  
This year young boys in Umbro  
Shall plunge the struggling sheep.

And, in the vats of Luna,  
This year, the must shall foam  
Round the white feet of laughing girls,  
Whose sires have marched for Rome."

Such quotations could be multiplied at pleasure. The effect of this method of description is that the attention is kept alive and active; it scarcely feels that the poet is really pausing in his narrative. Although therefore scenic description is alien to the ballad, Macaulay has made a compromise which almost conceals the intrusion of a modern innovation. He describes; but in terms of life. And few but will pardon a technical liberty which has given us these lines.

There are, naturally, other touches which betray Macaulay's *Lays* as exotics, as consciously written poems instead of rhymes of the people. As in his prose, he is fond in his poetry of opening up little glimpses into the background, of dashing in a little colour with each name he mentions. Compare the lines on

"Aruns of Volsinium  
Who slew the great wild boar—

The great wild boar that had its den  
Amid the reeds of Cosa's fen,  
And wasted fields, and slaughtered men  
Along Albinia's shore."

And those on how

Valerius smote down Julius  
Of Rome's great Julian line,  
Julius, *who left his mansion*  
*High on the Velian hill,*  
*And through all turns of weal and woe*  
*Followed proud Tarquin still.*  
Now right across proud Tarquin  
A corpse was Julius laid" etc.

A ballad poet or singer, eager to come to the climax of his tale, would not dart in this fashion along the lines of needless association, nor fill in these purely literary garnishings of the story. Always alien to the strict ballad spirit, they are a distinct error when introduced in such a passage as Virginius' speech to his daughter. This is perhaps the least fortunate passage Macaulay has penned in verse. Such a piece of literary refinement is an incongruous patch on a poem which aims at reproducing the old simplicity of the ballad. Virginius is actually

made, at this intense moment, to indulge in phrases like "Capua's marble halls," and in comparisons like that of Appius to a kite. We see now the effect of allowing the thin end of the wedge: the modern spirit has gone too far and defaced the old style of poetry. Far truer to the ballad spirit are the simple words in which Horatius dedicates himself:

"Oh Tiber, Father Tiber,  
To whom the Romans pray,  
A Roman's life, a Roman's arms  
Take thou in charge this day."

That is all. The whole scene appeals by its own force.

There is a tone, too, about the modern ballads, of a higher morality than belongs to the period of the true ballad songs. The old theme is war and the chase and love, with perhaps a word of rude morality here and there. We have advanced from that stage and our poetry cannot but reflect that advance. In Macaulay, over and above the excitement of event, our sympathy

is enlisted on one side or other as being the side of right against wrong. There is a civic tone, also, in Macaulay, as Mr Morison has indicated; although "the real romantic ballad and its modern imitations properly refer to times in which the notion of a State has not emerged. The *polis* is not to be found in Homer, or in Chevy Chase, or in Scott." Horatius offers his life "for the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his gods"—not merely in an old-time spirit of defiance and war—

"And for the holy maidens  
Who feed the eternal flame,  
To save them from false Sextus  
That wrought the deed of shame."

They who fight are "Romans in Rome's quarrel";  
it is no Homeric contest

*αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων.*

And in the battle at Regillus we feel of the  
gods, before they say it, that

"For the right, we come to fight,  
Before the ranks of Rome."

In *Virginia* the civic and moral feelings are

strongest of all. So far as such moral motives are added to heroic deeds, a sentiment is revealed which is in advance of the age of the ballad. There is less of it in Scott than in Macaulay, less in Macaulay than in Wordsworth.

By all such departures from the old spirit of the autochthonous ballad songs, we can find out their modern imitations. Yet to a modern reader all this will be unnoticed, and our criticism, it may be, will savour of the pedantic. But we ought to remember that the same reason which leads to the commission of what are strictly errors, leads the reader also to overlook them. They are there because the author is a modern author; they are not seen because the reader is a modern reader. None the less ought they to be observed when, as in Macaulay's case, the poet makes a distinct bid for fame as a ballad singer.

Macaulay's lesser poems require little comment. His *Sermon in a Churchyard* does not gain by comparison with Gray's *Elegy*, unless



in the great purity of its English ; his religious poems show only in another aspect the receptiveness of his mind to such influences. *Naseby* is the best of these works ; its metre is tuneful and well fits the spirit of the theme. His fame will be attached to his *Lays*. And, exotic or not exotic, criticism will not dull the fire of those brilliant verses. Innovator or not, correct or not, he is the most splendid balladist of this century ; less complex than Scott, more vigorous than Coleridge, far fresher than the *Laodamia*. Nor is it easy to remember even among the old ballads the same vigour and life which shoots through the *Lays*. They speak our language with beauty, and our sentiments truly. A martial hurry and rush, a spirit that is clear and high and warlike and noble against odds—these are the things which in a brave and free land are most potent to thrill the soul and make the blood leap. And Macaulay's versification is splendidly deceptive, continually exciting the mind, and hustling the attention to keep it

active, breaking through the old barriers of alternate measure, and holding us often in breathless pause by the ring of many consecutive rhymes. It rises and falls with free irregularity to suit the theme. Such sentiments so expressed give the type of his poetic genius; nothing that is lofty or profound: but directness, effectiveness, vividness of presentation of those things which stir and disturb what is next to the best in our nature,—its spirit, its animus, its courage never to submit nor yield.

Thus far Macaulay as a man of letters. He is an interpreter between us and great minds of the past. His enthusiasm is full of heat and force; his language is full of grace and sweetness; his page is brilliant and vivid. And he himself is one of whom Literature may boast; all that we know of the man adds new loveliness to what he has written. There are but a few men whose names we thus treasure for what they were, whose writings we cherish, spite of faults that are plain to the reason, for the

reflection we see in them of true greatness and nobility of mind ; and of these men Johnson and Macaulay are, to me, the greatest. Even had they themselves not made literature, we could still take pride in thinking that such are the men whom literature has made. Such *alumni* reflect the glory of, and are an ornament to, the pursuit. No criticism of what he has said will deny Macaulay's splendid influence, an influence that has not passed away, but has been absorbed into the vital spirit of the literature of our century ; an influence revealed not less in our purity of style, than in the purity of our love of literature herself. All that she made him, he has helped to make his age. On this ground we stand surest in predicting his immortality. His "glorious lady with the eyes of light" will continue to fulfil to him her promise :

"Yes ; thou wilt love me with exceeding love,  
And I will tenfold all that love repay."

There are many who think that Macaulay's best genius was for public life. And although

this was not his own feeling, it must be admitted that his speeches are sounder and more solid than anything he wrote, while they are still among the outstanding models of our national oratory. As it is, however, he gave to the State, not without inward grudgings, but a brief portion of his life. Of high office, he had only a taste. His political work in England was done for the most part on the floor of the House, rather than in an Office of State. His speeches sum up by far the most valuable part of it.

He achieved political fame with marvellous rapidity: his public life is a brief meteor-like flash of genius. Nearly all that is great in it is connected with the events of those few turbulent years, during which he stepped at one stride from obscurity into the front of political life, and fought in the van, second almost to none, for emancipation and Reform.

“To him, as to the burning levin,  
Short, bright, resistless course was given.”

Few statesmen have made their mark so rapidly,

so decisively, and so triumphantly. In but a short period of active conflict, at an early age, and while still in his political apprenticeship, he made his name a name of dread to the most skilled Parliamentarians of the Tory Party, and his voice a rallying note amid those who rushed the outworks in the struggle for political freedom. It was in a brief and brilliant moment, a moment of crisis which found him ready, that he did his greatest work as an orator. Thenceforth he was content to see others carry on the torch, and to stand forth but now and then in offensive or defensive debate.

His weakness as a man of letters was, in great part, his strength as a debater. The House of Commons has never been patient of theorists. There was a time, in the days of such as Addison, when literary eminence was the surest step to an appointment from the Crown. That day is now past; and even the great men of letters who adorn, and have adorned the House of Commons in recent years, have not,

for all their deeper wisdom, proved in debate to be the match of men whose readiness has been greater than their learning. Resource is a far more important quality of the politician than depth. The House of Commons does not want abstract reasonings in political science ; what it requires is practical civil wisdom, coolness in the heat of crisis, ready intuition of the right thing to do, decisive utterance of the chosen policy, firmness in carrying it right through. It does not want men who expound consistent and symmetrical policies ; but men who can quickly adapt their policy to new facts, who can see the practically expedient course to take, who prefer the compromise that is useful in the present to consistency with the past, who stand by plain maxims of common sense rather than see much to be said for both sides, who can hit hard rather than reason profoundly. "We Englishmen," as Burke says, "stop very short of the principles upon which we support any given part of our constitution ; or even the whole of it together...

This is nothing but what is natural and proper. All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter. We balance inconveniences ; we give and take ; we remit some rights that we may enjoy others ; and we choose rather to be happy citizens than subtle disputants...Man acts from adequate motives relative to his interest, and not on metaphysical speculations." It is slight wonder, therefore, that Macaulay rapidly achieved fame in Parliament. His ready enthusiasms, the quickness with which he made up his mind, the tenacity with which he held to his convictions, his distaste for theory, his respect for history, were the very qualities to win him success. He has often shown us that this was his own estimate of political method in England. "To think nothing of symmetry and much of convenience ; never to innovate except when some grievance is felt ; never to innovate except so far as to get rid

of the grievance; never to lay down any proposition of wider extent than the particular case for which it is necessary to provide; these are the rules which have, from the age of John to the age of Victoria, generally guided the deliberations of our two hundred and fifty Parliaments. Our national distaste for whatever is abstract in political science amounts undoubtedly to a fault; yet it is perhaps a fault on the right side." (*History*, Ch. XI.) Such is the temper to which his own mind was adapted. It is characteristic of him to speak as he spoke on the Reform Bill, when he said: "I praise the Ministers for not attempting at the present time to make the representation uniform. I praise them for not assigning members to the districts by the Rule of Three. The Government has, in my opinion, done all that was necessary for the removal of a great practical evil, and no more than was necessary. I consider this as a practical question. I rest my opinion on no general theory of government. I distrust all general theories of government." All that aversion to



speculation which detracts from his written words gave nerve to his eloquence when he spoke.

His speeches on Reform are a clear note of triumph that the forward spirit must have its way, and of warning against the policy of coercion. They are the utterances of a man who is essentially the product of his age, for whose thoughts the season is just fully ripe. He had well gauged the spirit of his time. He saw that the England which emerged from the great European struggle was altogether a new England. National pride was high. In the presence of a great danger loyalty to the State had been preferred to loyalty to party. The ideals of statesmanship had been purified; perfect political uprightness became a mark of the ministers of the Crown. England had been sobered and shaken together. In morals and literature the same new light was reflected. National spirit was swelling, and coming to greater self-consciousness. In the excitement of the war it had revealed itself in jealous and loyal patriotism. It was inevitable that after

the war this spirit, once stirred, should be found pressing on within the nation toward the ideals for which the time was ready. But though the fire of new *esprit de corps* was burning, it was damped by evils that called for remedy. Food was dear. The very cessation of the war had given a violent shock to prices and to agriculture. The promises made to Ireland in 1800 were still unredeemed, and the people was restless under the yoke of an alien creed. Above all, the expanding spirit of the whole nation was stifled and choked in expression for the want of a free political air. Therefore, within a common enthusiasm which united the whole State, great social movements were beginning to shape themselves ;

“The warders of the growing hour,  
But vague in vapour, hard to mark.”

National liberty was bringing political freedom to the birth. The State was in the throes of reform. Extreme developments, Socialism and Chartism, were hurrying on her hour.

Yet now, as always, England was patient and long-suffering. Reform was often mooted in the Commons, only to be dismissed. The Six Acts were passed. Two Tory Ministries repressed with a high hand, and not without bloodshed, a spirit they did not understand. Yet the people accepted such reforms in trade and currency as were offered, and was content to nurse its spirit against a later day. But after fourteen years the time was come. The sign of it was the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.

This was the moment for a great statesman, and England was well served. The Whig leaders were at least earnest and firm. They felt the pulse quicken and they knew it was no fever, but England's hour :

“The spirit of the years to come  
Yearning to mix itself with life.”

They had made no mistake. Our Greater Charter was delivered in its season, in peace and without convulsion.

It was at this time that Macaulay entered the House. He was full of the national spirit. He had balanced the risks, and he stepped into the arena with all the enthusiasm of a winning cause. The time had produced one of its men. By warning, exhortation, and appeal, his splendid eloquence stirred and shook the spirit of the House. He had the heat and force of a reformer, and the highest power of effective eloquence. The result of his first speech was extraordinary. The House was profoundly moved. Nor can we wonder; for it is a speech in which the orator can be felt to be the spokesman of an epoch. It is pervaded, like all his speeches on Reform, by a glowing Demosthenic fire, by the throb of genuine emotion and excitement. It cannot be read slowly. We can only imagine its delivery. Thereafter, in the youthful member for Calne, Reform had found its most formidable expression. His voice, Mr Gladstone tells us, was "like a trumpet-call to fill the benches." And who but could wish Demosthenes were here to

render in Greek this splendid and burning peroration?

“Do they wait for that last and most dreadful paroxysm of popular rage, for that last and most cruel test of military fidelity? Let them wait, if their past experience shall induce them to think that any high honour or any exquisite pleasure is to be attained by a policy like this. Let them wait, if this strange and fearful infatuation be indeed upon them, that they should not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their heart. But let us know our interest and our duty better. Turn where we may, within, around, the voice of great events is proclaiming to us, Reform, that you may preserve. Now therefore, while everything, at home and abroad, forbodes ruin to those who persist in a hopeless struggle against the spirit of the age, now, while the crash of the proudest throne on the Continent is still sounding in our ears, now, while the roof of a British palace affords an ignominious shelter to the exiled heir

of forty kings, now, while we see on every side ancient institutions subverted and great societies dissolved, now, while the heart of England is still sound, now, while old feelings and old associations retain a power and a charm that may too soon pass away, now, in this your accepted time, now, in this your day of salvation, take counsel, not of party spirit, not of the ignominious pride of a fatal consistency, but of history, of reason, of the ages that are past, of the signs of this most portentous time. Renew the youth of the State. Save property divided against itself. Save the multitude, endangered by its own ungovernable passions. Save the aristocracy, endangered by its own unpopular power. Save the greatest and fairest and most civilised community that ever existed, from calamities which may in a few days sweep away all the rich heritage of so many ages of wisdom and glory. The danger is terrible. The time is short. If this bill should be rejected, I pray to God that none of those who concur in rejecting

it may ever remember their votes with unavailing remorse, amidst the wreck of laws, the confusion of ranks, the spoliation of property, and the dissolution of social order."

Little wonder if the excitement of the House was tremendous, if the then Speaker looked on a scene his experience could not parallel, if the names of Canning and Fox and Burke were on everyone's lips.

"Reform that you may preserve,"—this is the note that Macaulay strikes. He is for Reform that preserves the old while ingrafting on it the new. Between incautious change and stubborn prescription, the Whig party, as he understood it, took the middle way. The spirit of his oratory is essentially that of a movement which has come in its proper and due season; which can afford to be moderate although firm; which is no passing reaction that runs headlong to an extreme; which puts aside Chartism no less than prescription. It is the spirit of a reform strictly defensive; a reform that invaded

no rights, but which came at the moment to prevent such an invasion ; a reform which aimed at the organic development of our constitution, not at its destruction and renovation. England has been fortunate in this patience and sobriety of her national spirit in crises such as upset thrones abroad. We may be grateful that the Reform leaders spoke in the tones of defence rather than of aggression : that those who, like Macaulay, led the advance, were no bigots with a theory, but men in touch with and responsive to the spirit of their age ;

“Who knew the season when to take  
Occasion by the hand, and make  
The bounds of freedom wider yet.”

His speeches on the Irish question, as it then appeared, well show how much in hand did he hold the spirit of progress. His sympathy with Ireland was one of the moving influences of his political life. Next to his Reform speeches, and a speech on Indian affairs, none of his utterances are so eloquent as those on behalf of the religious



and social freedom of that strangely ill-fated country. But he would have none of the Repeal of the Union; his famous reply to O'Connell is in his firmest and most direct tone. And it is of interest to note, in view of the recent developments of this question, that Macaulay is to be ranked with those Whigs who saw no practicability in the in-and-out scheme. It had not, in his day, been propounded with the same pretence with which it was ushered in in 1886; but it is certain at least that Macaulay repudiated it on much the same grounds as those which were afterwards to send half the Whig leaders over to the other side. "To remove every just cause of complaint," was his policy in 1833. Whether in 1886 this would still have been his attitude must depend on what emerges, after sixty years, from his words: "If, on a fair trial, it be found that Great Britain and Ireland cannot exist happily together as parts of one empire, in God's name let them separate." But he had too wholesome a respect for prescription to be found with the

Home Rule party in the first flush of its enthusiasm.

The high authority of his voice was given also to the movement for a broader religious toleration. At his time, this question was touching the heart of the nation deeply. Ireland exhibited the doubtful experiment of the ruling of creed by creed. From the discontent in that country, which was not wholly removed in 1829, came the germ of reflection which has bloomed and borne fruit there, and which is in its blossom in England to-day. Macaulay's descent may have greatly influenced his views on this question; but his toleration, from whatever source it came, was both lofty and broad; how broad, may be seen by anyone who compares the speech on Maynooth College with his unsparing attack on Catholicism in the opening of the History. There can be no doubt that the disestablishment movement would have found in him a powerful and strenuous advocate.

But of all his speeches by far the grandest is

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that which he delivered on Indian affairs in 1833, and which secured him his seat as a Member of Council in Calcutta for the next few years. It is not, as we shall see, in the style most characteristic of his oratory ; it rather resembles the most brilliant and richly coloured of his Essays. The theme of India inspired him to the richest wealth of allusion and the most gorgeous illustration ; and all this is welded, by his warm earnestness, into one with exact and careful statesmanship. Next to his first speech on Reform, none so well deserves to be quoted to the fame of his eloquence.

Macaulay returned from India to find that the glory of the Whigs had departed. For two years he served, in Office, a broken and divided party. For six years more his voice was still at the service of the old cause. But with the fall of the Melbourne Ministry, politics ceased to occupy the centre of his life. The spirit of the fight might draw him now and again to match himself with Peel ; and the force and vigour of

his eloquence remained unimpaired. But his heart was elsewhere. He did not court the fame of an orator or a statesman. There was another fame which he coveted more. Hence his defeat in 1847 was almost a welcome relief. And in the closing days of his life, when his judgment had matured by retirement, and the hot impulse of party spirit had cooled, what we see is the individual silently watching from his seat in the House, with a graver eye, and a mind filled with reminiscences and reflections, the old and ever-changing struggle in which Pitt and Fox, Melbourne and Peel, Palmerston and Disraeli, were, he remembered, but the new and successive leaders of forces as old as our constitution, and each, in its measure, indispensable to our national life and freedom. Twice he stood forth on his own account, and his eloquence turned the feeling of the House to his view. He defeated,—“slew with his single arm”—the Copyright Bill of 1841, and carried on the lines of his own policy the Bill of 1842.

In 1853 he secured the rejection of the Exclusion of Judges Bill. For the rest, it was his high distinction as an individual which gave authority to his utterances on Free Trade and the Education movement.

A word must in conclusion be said on the style of his oratory. In the House itself, it was compared with that of Burke and Fox and Canning. Time has justified the comparison, in so far as it is true that while most histories barely mention Macaulay's name, no compendium of English oratory would be complete without his greatest speeches. But with some points of resemblance to these great predecessors, Macaulay has distinctive characteristics of his own. Burke is an orator in the true and literal sense. He is an accomplished pleader. He appeals to us as Englishmen to be cautious and calm and reasonable. He takes his audience into his own confidence, offers them the right hand and says "Come, let us reason together." He persuades, convinces, wins. He argues in a

spirit of conciliation—a spirit of patriotism which seeks to bring friend and foe into one common standpoint. He hides the party note in higher chords. He reasons as with a quick-tempered person who must not be scolded, but drawn over. Though skilled in fence, he conceals his skill. He takes the town by sap rather than sword in hand. He is lofty and sonorous rather than keen and dialectical. He seeks to embrace his opponent by consent, rather than to strike him down. This passage is in Burke's manner :

“For that service, for all service, whether of revenue, trade or empire, my trust is her interest in the British constitution. My hold of the colonies is in the close affection which springs from common names, from kindred blood, from similar privileges, from equal protection. These are ties which though light as air, are as strong as links of iron. Let the colonies always keep the idea of their civil rights associated with your government—they will cling and grapple to you ;

and no force under Heaven will be of power to tear them from their allegiance. But let it be once understood that your government may be one thing and their privileges another ; that these two things may exist without any mutual relation ; the cement is gone ; the cohesion is loosened ; and everything hastens to decay and dissolution...Do not dream that your letters of office and your instructions and your suspending clauses are the things that hold together the great contexture of the mysterious whole. These things do not make your government. Dead instruments, passive tools as they are, it is the spirit of the English communion that gives all their life and efficacy to them. It is the spirit of the English constitution which, infused through the mighty mass pervades, feeds, unites, invigorates, vivifies every part of the Empire, even down to the minutest member." (*On the War with America.*)

Even in argument there is no venom in Burke ; it is all clothed in rich eloquence and

deep solemnity of exhortation. Fox, on the other hand, is a debater firstly and chiefly. Here is the thrust and parry, the hot invective of debate; the flash and the ring of a rapier. But Fox fights as one taught to fight in style, as one trained to fence with grace; with long lunges, without flurry, without start, but all in one piece, now faster and now slower, now in earnest and now in play, like a single and continuous and ever-changing melody. His aim is to destroy his opponent, not to persuade him; but he displays a finished skill in the act of destruction. This is wherein he differs from Macaulay. The latter fights with less grace than effect; his blows are straight from the shoulder, he hits wherever and whenever he can. His is not the long easy rapier stroke of Fox, but the short, sharp stab of a dagger. His invective is clothed in no art, is infused only with passion. Instead of the subtle play of sarcasm which we find in Fox, we have in Macaulay more downrightness of argument.



"I defy you," "I challenge you," "Answer me, if you can, but do not interrupt me," such is Macaulay's method. He fights, not by art, but by the pure strength of his arm—with quick, hard, well-aimed blows. Of his style, we see the tone in such a passage as the following:

"If it be said that there is an evil in change as change, I answer that there is often an evil in discontent as discontent. This indeed is the strongest part of our case. It is said that the system works well. I deny it. I deny that a system works well which the people regards with aversion....Who wishes to dethrone the King? Who wishes to turn the Lords out of their House? Here and there a crazy radical whom the boys in the street point at as he walks along. Who wishes to alter the constitution of this House? The whole people. It is natural that it should be so....We have tried anodynes. We have tried cruel operations. What are we to try now? Who flatters himself that he can turn this feeling back? Does there remain any

argument which escaped the comprehensive intellect of Mr Burke, or the subtlety of Mr Windham? Does there remain any species of coercion which was not tried by Mr Pitt and by Lord Londonderry? We have had laws. We have had blood. New treasons have been created. The Press has been shackled. The Habeas Corpus Act has been suspended. Public Meetings have been prohibited. The event has proved that these expedients were mere palliatives. You are at the end of your palliatives. The evil remains. It is more formidable than ever. What is to be done?" His well-known invective against Peel in 1845 reveals the same qualities. There are indeed speeches in which he approaches nearer to the spirit of Burke; as in the Indian speech of 1833. But this is not his dominant mood as a speaker. He is by his proper genius a debater; more direct than Burke, less subtle than Fox. His eloquence is the passion of strong conviction, and the mark of it is its heat.

The study of Macaulay has been a labour of love. To enter into his mind is to be refreshed and inspired. His faults only bring him nearer to us; and apart from these, and from the virtues to which they are so closely wedded, the man, the figure, has a greatness of its own. In a passing century his name will be a time mark. His words and his deeds will be less than his life and his influence. His perfect love of letters will be the half at least of his literary fame; the high integrity, and the silent influence, of his active life will be a great part of his political fame. We have striven here to shun these extremes of statement to which all are liable who consider a great man by himself apart; and in Macaulay's case there is no room for any too thorough attitudes of admiration or distrust. He is too human for that. There is nothing about him of the grand. He stands on no pedestal. He is throughout affable, easy of access, plain spoken, with no barrier of reserve. He is a familiar friend who communicates readily all his

vast knowledge, and in whose life we understand every act. There is nothing awesome or mysterious in his genius. The impression he leaves on us is not that of exceptional qualities of mind ; it is that of a human nature much refined, but still very human. The immortality which he coveted most will be secured to him for the reflection that is in him of the light of knowledge, for the spirit he breathes of all that is noblest in literature. His fame will be that of one who gave efficient force to new ideas, whose work is absorbed in the spirit of the work of others, and who, in his generation, was great in achievement, but greater in example and in promise.

